

OLDER WOMEN TALK ABOUT ANGER

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ABSTRACT

Very little is known about older women's anger and, to date, nothing is known about how older women talk about anger. By limiting response options on questionnaires and using pre-determined categories to organize interview data, researchers have traditionally determined what constitutes anger and its expression. The unique focus on anger-talk in the current investigation sheds light on how the interviewer and interviewees co-construct anger within the context of a research interview. I conducted a discourse analysis of seven interview transcripts in order to explore two central questions: (1) how is anger co-constructed in participants' discourse? and (2) what is accomplished by those constructions? The older women in the present study used minimizing and distancing strategies to construct anger as within their control, in the past, and forgotten. Through these constructions, the interviewees established that they were not "angry women."

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1. INTRODUCTION

I once participated in a weekly writing group. The group's facilitator shared a story about a conflict she and her family had experienced many years ago. In this story, she referred to her mother's way of handling conflict as maintaining "peace at all costs." These words echoed in my mind as I realized "aha, that is *my* mother's way of handling conflict too!" This led me to reflect on how conflict was handled in my own family of origin, how my mother responded to conflict, and how I had both adopted and rejected aspects of her conflict management style.

When I asked myself "what did anger and conflict look like in our family?" I was able to identify a pattern of behaviour. My stepfather would occasionally "explode" without much warning. During the explosion, I would either flee or try to make myself invisible. The explosion would be followed by tense silence. Before long, however, my mother would attempt to melt the ice and, eventually, things would go back to "normal." We all knew, however, that another explosion could go off without warning; we had not gained any understanding about what had set off the first one, so we were unable to avoid the next one. The "episode" would not be discussed. Attempts at joking and reconnecting were made in lieu of direct apologies or explanations.

I became fairly skilled at reading the signs, and learned not to draw attention to myself when a storm was brewing. As a result, I was rarely the target of these anger episodes.

My mother rarely expressed anger but when she did it was not communicated directly. Instead, she withdrew into silence. Generally, her job was to keep the peace, or the illusion of peace, and to smooth things over when conflict did arise.

Thus, while anger and conflict were not directly discussed in my family, I certainly learned a great deal by watching and listening. I learned that “nice girls” are rewarded with love and affection. I learned that keeping the peace is more important than getting what I want or telling people what I really think. I learned how to “read” people and watch for signs of anger or hostility. And, I learned how to smooth things over when conflict arises, by using distraction, trying to move the conversation along, or pretending everything is fine.

These lessons have inevitably shaped how I respond to conflict as an adult. I am still very good at reading people and getting a sense of their emotional tone. If I sense that someone is potentially hostile or volatile, I will work to appease, distract, or avoid him or her. If, however, I sense that I can trust someone to be fairly even-tempered, I will not necessarily avoid a confrontation with him or her. I have become much more comfortable sharing my anger with others, but only when I feel it is safe to do so. Even then, I do not always communicate my anger directly, but sometimes resort to my mother’s approach: withdrawing into silence.

These reflections led to my interest in the topic of women’s anger. I know that my mother and I are not alone in our role as peacekeeper. I know that other women have been socialized to be “nice.” I began to wonder how these kinds of role expectations have shaped other women’s experiences and expressions of anger. I also wondered how other women respond to these expectations – do they adopt them and

use them to evaluate their own anger responses, or do they reject them as too restrictive? Or, like me, do they do both?

As I made my way through the literature on women and anger, I found that other researchers have asked these same types of questions. One area that has received little attention, however, is *older* women's anger. Despite a lifetime of experience and wisdom to share, this subgroup has remained virtually invisible in the literature on anger. I found only four studies that specifically explored older women's anger experiences. Within this extremely limited literature, there has been no investigation of *how* older women talk about anger. I decided, therefore, to explore this uncharted territory. I invited older women to share their anger experiences, but rather than focus on *what* was shared, I focused on *how* these women constructed and shared those experiences.

2. RELEVANT LITERATURE

2.1 Emotions: Individual or Social Phenomena?

Psychologists have traditionally viewed emotions as “internal and personal reactions” (Parkinson, 1996, p.663). Because emotions have been thought to be located primarily within the body or mind of the individual, they have most commonly been analysed from either a physiological or cognitive perspective. Physiological theories of emotion focus on the physical sensations and responses individuals experience when emotional arousal occurs (e.g., sweating, heart pounding) (Barry, 1999). Cognitive theories of emotion focus on individuals’ appraisal or interpretation of events. According to these theories, emotions are thought to occur “when an event is appraised by the individual as relevant to his or her concerns (e.g., goals, values)” (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994, p.52). The individual then evaluates whether an event is favourable or harmful to his or her concerns (primary appraisal), and whether he or she can handle the event (secondary appraisal) (Frijda & Mesquita, 1994).

Several researchers now challenge the assumption that emotions are primarily *individual* reactions, and suggest that they are best viewed as social phenomena (e.g., Averill, 1982; Barry, 1999; Frijda & Mesquita, 1994; Parkinson, 1996; Planalp, 1999). These researchers do not necessarily deny the contribution of physiological and cognitive processes, but suggest that they provide only a partial account of the emotion process (Parkinson, 1996).

Social constructionist approaches propose that emotion is interpersonally and culturally created (Cox, Stabb, & Bruckner, 1999). These approaches include a weaker and a stronger version of constructionism. The stronger version holds that all emotions are sociocultural products (Armon-Jones, 1986). The weaker (and more popular) version concedes that there is some limited range of “naturally occurring” basic emotional response (Armon-Jones, 1986), but is concerned with the *extent* to which emotions are socially constructed, *how* they are socially constructed, and the social functions that are served by emotions (Cox et al., 1999). I adopt this weaker version of social constructionism and explore how emotion-talk is constructed, and the social functions that are served by that talk.

2.2 Social Functions of Emotions

Parkinson (1996) argued that emotions are essentially communicative rather than internal and reactive phenomena. Our emotional displays tell others how we interpret or evaluate a situation (Parkinson 1996). While we do express emotions spontaneously, we also communicate emotions to others intentionally and strategically (Planalp, 1999). In the interest of creating a particular impression, we might express, suppress, exaggerate, or fabricate an emotional response. For example, we may try to present ourselves as fearless, loving or enraged, depending on the social goals we have in mind (Planalp, 1999). Finally, we communicate emotions in order to elicit emotional or behavioural responses from others (Parkinson, 1996). I argue that emotion-*talk* serves many of the same social functions: it is used to convey how we interpret a situation; to present ourselves in a particular light, depending on our social goals; and it is used to elicit a reaction from our conversation partner.

2.3 Anger

The focus of the current investigation is emotion-talk, and anger-talk more specifically, rather than the experience or expression of emotion per se. However, due to limited research on anger-talk, the current literature review will focus on anger itself as a social phenomenon. The following discussion explores the impact of the immediate social context within which anger is aroused, as well as the broader cultural context.

2.3.1 Influence of the Immediate Context

Emotions most often arise in the context of our interactions and relationships with others (Parkinson, 1996). Emotions are constructed and negotiated within those interactions and relationships (Crawford, Kippax, Onyx, Gault, & Benton, 1992; Parkinson, 1996). The things that others do and say typically trigger our greatest emotional responses, especially if we are involved in some kind of established relationship with them (Parkinson, 1996). Our emotional responses, in turn, influence the actions and reactions of our relationship partners.

“At its simplest, anger tells us that something is wrong” (Miller, 1991, p.188). It alerts us to violations of our rights, or to any number of interpersonal injustices (Thomas, 1993). This awareness can then motivate us to take action on our own behalf (Cox et al., 1999; Miller, 1991). This “action” may involve communicating our anger to the “wrongdoer.” The interpersonal purpose of anger is to persuade the target: (1) to acknowledge that he or she has violated one’s rights, and (2) to offer some kind of reparation (Parkinson, 1996). Regardless of what else they may accomplish, expressions of anger do tend to get people’s attention and convince them, at least for

the moment, that the issue is important (Planalp, 1999). They also tend to elicit an emotional or behavioural response in return (Barry, 1999; Frijda & Mesquita, 1994), though not always the intended response.

Anger is primarily an *interpersonal* emotion (Averill, 1982). We are, therefore, more likely to become angry toward loved ones and friends than toward strangers or people we dislike (Averill, 1982). Loved ones are the most common targets of our anger for several reasons: (1) our contact with them is close and continual, thereby increasing the chance of provocation; (2) we feel safer expressing anger with them (we trust it will be tolerated); (3) transgressions committed by those we care about tend to be more distressing as well as cumulative; and (4) we feel a stronger motivation to influence loved ones to change their behaviour (Averill, 1982).

2.3.2 Influence of the Broader Social Context

Although the targets and triggers of emotion are often individuals in our immediate interpersonal context, our appraisals of events as significant and emotion-provoking are influenced by our broader cultural context (Parkinson, 1996). People from different cultures place different relative values on certain goals, and therefore react differently to events that facilitate or hinder the attainment of those goals (Parkinson, 1996). For example, perceived threats to autonomy and independence are more likely to upset persons from an individualistic culture rather than a collectivist culture. On the other hand, perceived threats to harmony and connection with others are more likely to upset persons from a collectivist culture rather than an individualistic culture. In other words, cultural values suggest what is worth getting emotional about (Parkinson, 1996).

In comparing ancient and medieval views on anger with more modern ones, Kemp and Strongman (1995) found “surprisingly few changes in our concepts about anger in more than 2,000 years” (p.414). According to Aristotle (350 B.C., cited in Kemp & Strongman, 1995), emotions constituted the appetite, which was among the “common faculties” (i.e., common to animals and people). The uniquely human faculties, collectively known as the mind, were reason and the will. It was believed that the mind could and should override the appetites.

The “passions” were seen as dangerous and disruptive forces (Crawford et al., 1992). While it was believed that “a man... can keep in check the unseemly manifestations of his passion” (Galen, 180, cited in Kemp & Strongman, 1995), it was frequently conceded that people could be taken over by a passion such as anger. “In such cases they were held to be insane, and not in control of their actions” (Kemp & Strongman, 1995, p.402). Seneca condemned these spontaneous, uncontrolled fits of anger, describing the appearance and actions of an angry man as “an ugly and horrible picture of distorted and swollen frenzy” (45, cited in Kemp & Strongman, 1995).

This tension between powerful and potentially dangerous “passions” and the need for self-control is reflected in the way we understand and talk about emotions today. Early emotion theories proposed that, once triggered, emotions (i.e., passions) overcome us (Crawford et al., 1992). In other words, emotions were seen as something to which a person falls victim (Parkinson, 1996). Today, we still see anger as an involuntary and partly uncontrollable response, and do not necessarily hold people responsible for actions carried out in the “heat of the moment” (Parkinson, 1996).

However, more recent theoretical approaches see humans as capable of, and

responsible for, controlling and directing emotion rather than just responding reflexively (Thomas, 1993). “There is always room for deliberation and therefore always room for the modification or education of our emotions” (Crawford et al., 1992, p.122).

Western cultures are particularly concerned with controlling anger (Lakoff, 1987). In the interest of curbing its dangerous potential, we have developed elaborate social rules to govern its expression. Averill (1982) presented a list of these social rules, including: (1) rules of appraisal (e.g., a person has the right or duty to become angry at intentional wrongdoing); (2) rules regarding targets (e.g., anger should be directed only at persons who can be held responsible for their actions); and (3) rules of behaviour (e.g., the response should conform to community standards for appropriateness).

When Lutz (1990) interviewed white working-class and middle-class men and women about emotions, she found one theme frequently emerged: the “rhetoric of control” (p.71). When these men and women were asked to talk about emotions, the most common set of metaphors they used involved controlling, handling, coping, dealing, disciplining or managing their emotions. Lutz (1990) suggested that “the metaphor of control implies something that would otherwise be out of control, something wild and unruly, a threat to order” (p.72).

Anger is seen as a particularly dangerous emotion. Expressions used to describe our own and others’ angry responses (e.g., “he was hot under the collar,” “you make my blood boil”) reveal the central metaphor for anger: anger is heat (Lakoff, 1987). This metaphor “focuses on the fact that anger can be intense, that it

can lead to a loss of control, and that a loss of control can be dangerous” (Lakoff, 1987, p. 386).

2.4 Women and Anger

2.4.1 Gender Differences in the Experience and Expression of Anger: More Apparent than Real?

The prevailing belief is that women experience and express anger differently than men (Kopper & Epperson, 1991; Sharkin, 1993). Perhaps the most commonly held assumption is that women have greater difficulty acknowledging and expressing their anger directly (Lerner, 1997; Thomas, 1993). It has been suggested that women are too inhibited when it comes to the direct expression of anger, while men may not be inhibited enough (Lerner, 1988, cited in Sharkin, 1993). Speculation about these gender differences has been widespread, but has mainly been based on clinical work with therapy clients who have difficulty expressing anger appropriately and effectively (Thomas, 1993). Empirical support for the proposed gender differences has been limited (Kopper & Epperson, 1991; Sharkin, 1993).

Studies on *aggression* have been cited as evidence that men and women differ in their expression of anger (Frost & Averill, 1982; Sharkin, 1993). For many years “psychologists confused (and in some cases equated) anger and aggression” (Kemp & Strongman, 1995, p.415). Many researchers now recognize that (1) aggression as an expression of anger is relatively rare (Averill, 1982), and (2) aggression can occur in the absence of anger (Kemp & Strongman, 1995). Therefore, any gender differences that exist in the capacity for aggression do not shed light on potential gender differences in the experience of *anger*.

Women are generally viewed as emotionally expressive, with the exception of anger (Frost & Averill, 1982; Sharkin, 1993), whereas men are generally viewed as emotionally inexpressive with the exception of anger (Sharkin, 1993). Interestingly, the few gender differences that are found in the literature actually contradict these common assumptions. In their survey of 240 white middle-class adults, Malatesta and Kalnok (1984) found that women reported more inhibition of emotion (i.e., not just anger) than men. When they had participants complete the Emotional Control Questionnaire, Tahmaseb McConatha, Lightner and Deaner (1994) found that men reported greater inhibition of feelings of hostility and aggression than women. Finally, Averill (1982) found that, rather than reporting that they dampened or suppressed their anger, women were more likely to report that their expression of anger was actually greater than the incident called for (i.e., they reported “over-reacting”). The one reported gender difference that might support the notion that women are more emotionally expressive is the finding that women reported crying, when angry, more often than men (Averill, 1982). The relationship between women’s anger and tears will be discussed later.

In their survey of college students, Kopper and Epperson (1991) reported no significant gender differences in proneness to anger, the tendency to express anger, the tendency to suppress anger, or the tendency to control the experience and expression of anger. In one of the few studies conducted on the everyday experience of anger, Averill (1982) surveyed both college students (aged 21 years and under) and community residents (aged 21-60). He found that “women become angry as frequently and as intensely as men, for much the same reasons, and with about the same

effectiveness” (Frost & Averill, 1982). Among their equally diverse sample (ranging in age from 21 to 83 years), Stoner and Spencer (1987) found no gender differences on either suppressed or outwardly expressed anger when they had participants complete the Anger Expression Scale.

Finally, in her review of anger studies, Tavis (1989) concluded that there are no differences between men and women in: (1) how they experience anger; (2) how they express anger; (3) how well they can identify their own anger; and (4) the categories of things that make them angry. Tavis (1989) concluded, along with Averill (1982) and others, that there are no fundamental differences in the way that men and women experience or express anger, despite popular assumptions and stereotypes that suggest otherwise. Tavis (1989) did, however, concede that men and women face different *consequences* for expressing anger.

Awareness of these different consequences might explain the gender differences Campbell and Muncer (1987) found in terms of *how* men and women tell stories about their own expressions of anger and aggression. These authors recorded and transcribed 6.5 hours of conversation between two same-sex groups of friends. One group consisted of eight professional women ranging in age from 28 to 40. The second group consisted of five professional men ranging in age from 26 to 40. The conversations focused on day-to-day “crises” resulting in verbal or physical aggression. The men and women shared accounts of their own aggressive behaviour.

On the basis of previous findings that women engage in aggression less frequently than men, and experience more anxiety about expressing aggression (Schill, 1972 cited in Campbell & Muncer, 1987), Campbell and Muncer (1987) expected that

women would be more likely than men to anticipate condemnation from their audiences when sharing stories about their own aggressive acts. They predicted, therefore, that women's accounts would include various "neutralization techniques" (e.g., excuses, justifications). These authors argued that men's aggressive acts are not subject to the same negative evaluations as women's aggressive acts. Therefore, they expected men would be more likely to anticipate a positive audience reaction, and less likely to use "justificatory rhetoric" (p.492) when describing their aggressive episodes (Campbell & Muncer, 1987).

Campbell and Muncer (1987) found no differences in the *types* of stories shared by men and women. The anger episodes they described were similar in terms of mode of aggression (direct, indirect, no action), form of aggression (verbal, physical, no action), location of aggression (e.g., work, home), and sex of antagonist. Gender differences emerged in terms of *how* men and women told their stories.

After describing the setting, participants, and motives for anger, the women often referred to the tension between anger and self-control. They believed that self-control was a morally good thing but "doing nothing" left them feeling frustrated, powerless, and regretful. When they did "lose control," the result was often not aggression, but tears. Finally, when they reacted aggressively, they feared they would be rejected or viewed as bitchy.

In describing their own aggressive acts, these women seemed to anticipate negative responses from the audience, but rather than make excuses as Campbell and Muncer (1987) had anticipated, they made use of a different form of defensive self-presentation: "preemptive self-condemnation" (p.507). They often concluded their

accounts with self derogatory statements (e.g., “I sounded like a real bitch”). Such comments serve to communicate to the audience that the actor has already condemned herself for her deplorable behaviour, “rendering further social punishment unnecessary” (p.507).

Campbell and Muncer’s (1987) expectations regarding men’s accounts were supported. Justification and excuses were absent from their talk. “The aggressive action itself was rendered intelligible merely by the statement of the precipitating event (e.g., “he gave me the finger;” “he called me a fag”). The significance of these behaviours did not have to be elaborated...it was clearly understood that such actions *required* an aggressive response” (emphasis in original) (p.509). In sharp contrast to the women’s self-condemnation, the men frequently expressed feelings of satisfaction and even elation after a “good fight.”

2.4.1.1 Summary

There is little evidence of gender differences in the experience or expression of anger. However, there is some evidence of differences in how men and women *talk about* their experiences and expressions of anger.

2.4.2 Women’s Anger Experiences

Jack (2001) found that “women’s decisions regarding how and where to express anger are most strongly influenced by the anticipated reactions of others” (p.385). The reaction a woman anticipates will depend on the immediate context in which her anger arises (e.g., who is involved?), her past experiences with anger, and the broader social context in which her anger expressions are evaluated as appropriate or inappropriate.

2.4.2.1 Immediate Context

Thomas (1993) conducted what she described as “the first large-scale, comprehensive, empirical investigation of women’s anger” (p.xi). The study examined anger and its health consequences for women (e.g., depression, eating disorders, substance use). More than 500 women (aged 25 to 66) from diverse occupational backgrounds completed an extensive test battery. In addition to completing established questionnaires (e.g., Trait Anger Scale, Perceived Stress Scale), participants responded to open-ended questions about their typical day-to-day experiences of anger. For example, they were asked about situations or circumstances that would trigger their anger, and people with whom they might become angry.

Thomas (1993) found that women held a set of personal ideologies or expectations regarding roles and behaviour (e.g., children should be respectful, the strong should not take advantage of the weak). They reported becoming angry when these expectations were not met. Their anger was provoked most frequently in the interpersonal realm, followed by intrapersonal (anger at self), followed by extrapersonal (anger at society). These findings support Averill’s (1982) assertion that anger is an interpersonal emotion. The women reported both experiencing and expressing anger with family members more than anyone else (Thomas, 1993).

2.4.2.2 Past Anger Experiences

Cox et al. (1999) conducted focus group interviews with the following groups: (1) young Muslim women (aged 19-32); (2) Latin American women (in their 30s and 40s); (3) African American women (in their late 30s through early 50s); and (4) older Jewish women (in their 60s and 70s). The women were asked: what do _____ think

of women who are angry? (men, other women, significant others, family members, people at work, members of your minority group). In responding to these questions, women often described how others had reacted to their own expressions of anger. They reported that these expressions were sometimes met with a supportive response, but the majority of the interactions they described involved responses that were rejecting, minimizing, ridiculing, or punishing. When asked how men reacted to their anger, most women described their partners as withdrawing, ignoring or diminishing their anger. The women said that they found these responses very frustrating, suggesting they “belittle their concerns and convey the message that they are not important enough to be taken seriously” (Cox et al., 1999, p.201).

Crawford and her colleagues (1992) described themselves as white, middle-class, well-educated women (psychologists and academics) between their late forties and early sixties. Feeling dissatisfied with “the accepted theories of emotion” (p.5), they decided to adopt a somewhat radical approach to studying emotions. Using particular emotions (e.g., anger, happiness, fear) or events (e.g., holidays) as triggers, they recorded and analysed their own memories of childhood experiences. One woman recalled a time when, at the age of 13, she was physically punished by her father for expressing anger. She claimed that after this experience, she would hesitate before expressing anger again. While the fear of retaliation and punishment can certainly deter us from communicating our anger, the authors argued that “the most powerful mechanism for discouraging the expression of anger comes from having it invalidated” (p.177). They recalled times when they were told directly or indirectly that their anger was inappropriate. One woman recalled a time when she was 12 and

her rage was met with laughter and urges to “be a good sport” (Crawford et al., 1992, p.177).

Reiser (1999) conducted in-depth interviews with 25 men (in their 40s and 50s) and 25 women (in their 30s and 40s). Because “our anger repertoire... is at least partly conditioned by what we encountered in our family of origin and our early experiences with anger” (Reiser, 1999, p.50), Reiser (1999) asked participants to talk about what they had learned about anger growing up, and what typically happened at home when someone was angry. Only nine of the 25 women said that anger was discussed in the home while they were growing up, and what they were told was not always helpful (e.g., “if you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything at all”). Some said that their parents rarely or never showed anger in front of them, but the majority remembered “loud, explosive and sometimes violent anger episodes” (p.60) while growing up. Typically, it was their father who was explosive, while their mother was more calm. One woman reported that, “somewhere along the way she developed the idea that anger is a negative emotion that requires some control” (p.57).

Reiser (1999) also asked participants what they used to do when they were angry while growing up, and what they do today. Most women said that when they were very young they retreated (e.g., went to their room), held their anger feelings in, and/or cried. However, most of the women also reported that they no longer responded to anger the way they had when they were growing up. Of those who tended to hold their anger in, the majority later became more open and expressive with their feelings, or were trying to be. These findings illustrate the potential for change, as women reject early lessons about anger and find more effective ways to communicate their feelings.

2.4.2.3 Broader Social Context

Social rules allow those with greater social power and dominance to feel, openly display, and act on anger more than those who are less powerful (Cox et al., 1999; Jack, 2001). In our largely patriarchal western society, where “men (of a certain group) have held all the legitimate leadership, power, and authority” (Miller, 1991, p.182), men have much more permission than women to show anger, both publicly and privately (Jack, 1999). Women, and others who find themselves in low-power positions, are trained to believe that they have “no cause” to be angry (Miller, 1991, p.184). If they do experience anger, they believe there must be something wrong with them (Miller, 1991).

These same women are often socialized to be “nice,” and to equate femininity with self-sacrifice (Jack, 1999). This traditional view of femininity demands that a woman put her needs second to those of everyone else, in order to create harmony, “or at least the appearance of harmony” (Jack, 1999, p.62). According to these traditional standards, directly communicating one’s anger is considered decidedly “unfeminine,” and any action that opposes another or creates conflict is seen as hurtful and selfish (Jack, 1999).

Miller (1991) suggested that “the profound cultural fear of women’s anger is probably connected to the fact that women have been the principal ‘caretakers’” (p.186). Women are socialized to be nurturant, and to focus their energy on sustaining relationships and caring for others (Jack, 1999). The direct expression of anger or rage is clearly incompatible with this social role (Jack, 1999; Thomas, 1993).

These kinds of role expectations reflect social norms. These norms supply a

kind of “map people use to navigate the interpersonal world – a map outlining the boundaries of acceptable behaviour” (Jack, 1999, p.53). It seems that norms regarding *emotional* behaviour are often applied differently to men and women (Reiser, 1999).

In their focus groups with four groups of women, Cox et al. (1999) found that women in all groups believed emotion norms had changed significantly over the past several years. These women believed that the outward expression of women’s anger had become more socially acceptable.

Cancian and Gordon (1988) wanted to examine whether emotion norms had indeed changed over the 20th century. They analysed a random sample of marital advice articles published in American women’s magazines between 1900 and 1979. They argued that, throughout the 20th century, women’s magazines have socialized their readers to the “proper” expressions of love and anger in marriage through several mechanisms, including vocabulary and sanctions. Language used to talk about anger (e.g., “blow-ups,” “loss of temper”) differentiated between appropriate and inappropriate forms of anger. Some articles warned about social sanctions for inappropriate expressions of anger, including being deserted by one’s husband, and more generally, being disliked, lonely and miserable.

In the 1920s and 1930s, avoidance of conflict and angry episodes through self-control signified a “natural femininity” and was thought to reflect the different emotional natures of men and women. It was believed that anger was a natural part of the male temperament, so women were advised to help their husbands tame their anger. On the other hand, the female temperament was presumed to be characterized by sweetness and “a superior ability to persuade gently, through tears and love”

(Cancian & Gordon, 1988, p. 318). Wives who could not control their anger risked losing their husbands: “it is the naggers, the neurotics, the peevish, fretful, complaining, dissatisfied wives who are always losing their husbands to the yes-yes ladies” (Dix, 1932, p.12, cited in Cancian & Gordon, 1988, p.318).

In the 1940s, women were advised to be realistic and lower their expectations of marriage. This was sure to reduce any feelings of anger, frustration, or disappointment with one’s husband (Cancian & Gordon, 1988).

Self-sacrifice was a major theme in the marital advice of the 1950s and early 1960s. Putting aside one’s own needs or concerns was defined as loving behaviour, whereas “thinking of self first was unloving and displayed lack of genuine concern for others” (Kidd, 1975, p.34, cited in Cancian & Gordon, 1988, p.318). Women were advised to be considerate, avoid conflict, and strive for harmony and unity.

With the increasing interest in self-development in the late 1960s and 1970s, many articles explicitly rejected the old ideals of self-sacrifice and harmony. Wives were advised to communicate openly about their feelings, including anger, and to work through conflicts with their partners. During this period, the expression of anger came to signify the strength of a marriage rather than its weakness.

The timing of these changes in marital advice coincided with the expansion of the women’s movement, supporting Cancian and Gordon’s (1988) assertion that “emotion norms are connected to waves of political and cultural liberation versus oppression” (p.310). Early in the twentieth century, wives were advised to suppress their anger and sacrifice their own interests in order to preserve their marriages – advice that obviously reinforced their subordinate position in the marital relationship.

When emotion norms shifted to encourage self-fulfillment instead of self-sacrifice and allowed the expression of disagreements and angry feelings, a more equitable balance of power was possible (Cancian & Gordon, 1988).

Stearns and Stearns (1986, cited in Cancian & Gordon, 1988) did not see a radical change in emotion norms in the 1960s and 1970s, perhaps because they did not differentiate between norms directed at men, and norms directed at women. They stated that “by 1950, a rough equality of expectations for the sexes in the matter of anger control prevailed” (Stearns & Stearns, 1986, p.197, cited in Cancian & Gordon, 1988). Cancian and Gordon (1988) strongly disagreed with this assertion, arguing that the marital advice they analysed was clearly directed at women, not men.

Emotion norms may have become less rigid throughout the 20th century, but Cancian and Gordon (1988) argued that these norms continue to regulate the expression of anger. Contrary to the idea that “Americans are becoming naturally impulsive and free of cultural constraints on emotion, an elaborate emotional culture is evident in these articles, in all decades” (Cancian & Gordon, 1988, p.314). However, marital advice has shifted from repression of all conflict and anger, to its careful, constructive expression. There continue to be powerful cultural constraints against uncontrolled anger within marriage.

2.4.3 Women’s Expressions of Anger

Women do not passively accept the cultural standards and norms that are meant to govern their behaviour (Crawford et al., 1992). Rather, many women actively resist these standards, even as they adopt them and use them to evaluate their own behaviour (Brown, 1998; Campbell & Muncer, 1987; Jack, 1999). Cultural norms

dictate that women should not express anger. Clearly, many women resist these norms as they express their feelings of anger, often in very direct, “unfeminine,” ways. And yet, following their direct expressions of anger, women often feel a sense of shame and regret (Campbell & Muncer, 1987; Jack, 1999). Well aware of the labels used to describe “angry women” (e.g., hysterical, witch, shrew, bitch), they condemn their “loss of control,” referring to their behaviour as irrational and destructive (Jack, 1999; Lerner, 1997).

Jack (1999, 2001) conducted semistructured interviews with 60 women (aged 17 – 75, mean age = 36) to examine their experiences of anger and aggression in everyday life. When her participants’ narratives were coded for elements of anger expression, six response patterns emerged. Jack (2001) argued that these patterns fell into two categories: bringing anger into relationship, and keeping anger out of relationship. She found that women reported bringing anger into relationship: (1) positively and directly, through constructive dialogue; (2) aggressively, through verbal or physical assaults; and (3) indirectly, through masking anger (e.g., using hostile silence). Jack’s participants reported keeping anger out of relationship: (1) consciously and constructively, by expressing it in positive ways outside of the relationship; (2) by expressing anger explosively, but not in the presence of others; and (3) through self-silencing (e.g., doing nothing).

The literature on women’s expressions of anger will be organized using Jack’s (2001) broad categories: bringing anger into relationship, and keeping anger out of relationship. Contrary to the common belief that women suppress anger, most of these response patterns fall within the former category, with only one type of response

(doing nothing) reflecting the choice to keep anger out of relationship.

2.4.3.1 Bringing Anger Into Relationship

2.4.3.1.1 Discussion

Both Averill (1982) and Tavris (1989) argued that men and women do not differ in their experience or expression of anger, but they do differ in their willingness to *talk* about their feelings. One of the only gender differences Averill (1982) found was that women were more likely than men to talk the anger incident over with the instigator or a neutral third party.

The tendency of females to discuss anger with a confidante (or “third party”) has been documented as early as the fourth grade (Brondolo, 1992, cited in Thomas, 1993). In her conversations with adolescent girls, Brown (1998) learned that “in the privacy of the group or with best friends, [the girls] feel they can talk about their desires and express their frustrations and their anger – they count on the loyalty of those they trust to protect their outlaw feelings” (p.96). Parkinson (1996) might argue that we do more than just report or share our feelings when we discuss them with friends; we negotiate and make sense of those feelings. Evaluations and appraisals of events may develop over the course of conversations with others, as “the emotional importance of what is happening [becomes] mutually apparent only as a function of an interpersonal reasoning process” (Parkinson, 1996, p.665).

2.4.3.1.2 Repression followed by explosion

Because women are not expected to express anger directly, they often choke back such feelings, releasing them only after a series of provocations, “when pressure-cooker levels of emotional steam have been reached” (Thomas, 1993, p.xiv). The

response inevitably is perceived, by both the target and the woman experiencing the anger, as an overreaction that is out of proportion to the provocation (Baumeister, Stillwell, & Wotman, 1990; Thomas, 1993). The target can then dismiss the anger and label the woman as “hysterical” or “emotional” (Miller, 1991; Reiser, 1999). Her “loss of control” only confirms a woman’s fears that her anger is indeed “irrational” and “destructive” (Lerner, 1997), and convinces her to redouble her efforts at sealing over her anger the next time (Thomas, 1993).

2.4.3.1.3 Direct and indirect aggression

Aggression can refer to verbal or physical assaults that are meant to hurt others. Women do engage in this type of destructive aggression, of course, but they also use the term “aggression” to refer to such diverse behaviours as confronting or opposing another, or voicing their own needs (Jack, 1999). As she spoke to women about their own aggressive actions, Jack (1999) discovered that “the smallest departures by women from submissive, deferential behaviour – including tone of voice – may be labelled angry or hostile because they deviate from traditional norms of femininity” (Jack, 1999, p.28). Jack (1999) defined aggression as “forcefully bringing one’s will, desires and voice into relationship to oppose or displace those of another, for either constructive or destructive purposes” (Jack, 1999, p.43). Jack’s (1999) participants said they responded with aggression when they were angry, needed to protect themselves, or felt that their feelings would not be heard any other way. Whether their aggression is used for constructive or destructive purposes, women tend to evaluate their aggressive actions negatively (Campbell & Muncer, 1987; Reiser, 1999). All the women Jack (1999) interviewed used judgmental words like “bad” and

“mean” to evaluate themselves for acts they thought had hurt others.

As earlier noted, Campbell and Muncer (1987) found that women were more likely than men to anticipate condemnation from their audience when telling stories about their own aggressive behaviour. Whereas men expressed feelings of satisfaction and even elation after a “good fight,” women often concluded their accounts with self derogatory statements (e.g., “I sounded like a real bitch”).

Women are discouraged from expressing their anger directly. “Anger, except in some girlish tantrum is unfeminine. Direct, bold, eyeball-to-eyeball, confronting, dominating, resisting, insisting anger has been traditionally forbidden to women” (Bardwick, 1979, p.48, cited in Thomas, 1993). Girls and women, therefore, learn to express their anger through indirect means, including “dirty looks,” averted eyes (Brown, 1998), withdrawal, and the spreading of rumours (Jack, 1999). Using these types of hidden channels for the delivery of aggression “allows a hasty retreat if one is confronted” (Jack, 1999, p.189). Such indirect behaviours are culturally prescribed for women; they reflect expected “feminine” ways to avoid direct conflict. Yet, at the same time, they are “culturally condemned and seen as proof that women are more devious and less principled than men” (Jack, 1999, p.189). Clearly, women do not rely entirely on these indirect methods to communicate their anger (Jack, 1999), nor do they necessarily prefer these methods, as they reinforce the view of women as manipulative.

2.4.3.1.4 Silence

Responding with silence does not necessarily indicate compliance or submission. Silence is a powerful and yet safe way for women to communicate their

anger (Jack, 1999). It is a way to create distance and maintain control. This form of hostile silence “appears safer [than screaming or name-calling] because it stays within the edict of good femininity: don’t be verbally or physically aggressive” (Jack, 1999, p.206). However, like other indirect means of expressing anger, silence does not lead to change in the conditions that aroused the anger, and it “builds no bridges to others that could lead to dialogue, reconciliation, or new relational patterns” (Jack, 1999, p.210).

2.4.3.1.5 Crying

The main gender difference found in Averill’s (1982) first and third studies was that women reported crying, when angry, more than men did. To follow up on this unexpected finding, Averill (1982) decided to include direct questions about crying in his fourth study. He found that women were more likely to cry in response to episodes that were more serious, involved close relationships, and were difficult to resolve. The majority of respondents said their crying was a sign of frustration (78%), sadness (64%) and/or helplessness (55%). Crying is a means of expressing anger and frustration that is acceptably feminine (Jack, 1999) and, Averill (1982) concluded, “an effective means of eliciting sympathy” (p.296).

As the women in Campbell and Muncer’s (1987) study discussed their own anger and aggression episodes, “a pervasive theme was the build-up of frustration from controlling anger followed by a break down into crying or weeping” (Campbell & Muncer, 1987, p.497). Women tend to evaluate these “emotional outbursts” negatively, believing that others (particularly men) will view their tears as either manipulative or childish (Campbell & Muncer, 1987; Reiser, 1999). Women also

resent “bursting into tears” because it leads to their anger being misinterpreted as hurt rather than as the overwhelming frustration and rage they are experiencing (Crawford et al., 1992).

2.4.3.2 Keeping Anger Out of Relationship

2.4.3.2.1 Doing nothing

In western culture, we talk about anger and passion as dangerous “beasts inside a person” (Lakoff, 1987, p.392). Civilized people are supposed to keep that part of themselves private, to keep their anger under control. Many would argue that these expectations of control and suppression of anger are particularly salient for women.

Women are socialized to be nurturers and peacekeepers (Jack, 1999). They invest a great deal of energy in protecting others and preserving harmony in relationships (Lerner, 1997). They silence their own anger and frustration in order to protect others from such “uncomfortable feelings” (Lerner, 1997, p.27). They view the direct expression of anger as a threat to their relationships, their connections with others (Miller, 1991; Valentis & Devane, 1994). Thus, they work to keep anger out of important relationships in order to avoid hurting others or driving them away (Jack, 1999). Both the working-class and middle-class girls interviewed by Brown (1998) struggled to contain their feelings of anger in their relationships with friends, “afraid they might ‘go over the edge’ and risk ruin or irreparable damage to relationships that they count on for protection and support” (p.67).

The tension between expressing and controlling the feelings of anger is, therefore, often resolved by the decision to *do nothing*. In these situations, women’s anger is held in check until it eventually dissipates. On the one hand, women feel good

about this decision because doing nothing is a sign of self-control, and self-control is a morally good thing (Campbell & Muncer, 1987; Reiser, 1999). On the other hand, doing nothing leaves women feeling frustrated, regretful, and powerless (Campbell & Muncer, 1987; Reiser, 1999).

However, women's decisions to keep anger out of relationship go beyond socialization and the fear of hurting others. When Jack (1999) asked women why they curb their direct expressions of anger and aggression, the most common reason they cited was "fear of retaliation, the expectation of being hurt back physically, emotionally, or economically" (p.115). This fear of retaliation leads many women to silence their feelings of frustration and anger. They learn "to create a camouflage of appeasement, stillness, silence: don't draw attention to yourself, don't say much" (Jack, 1999, p.117).

2.4.3.3 Summary

Women are discouraged from expressing anger directly. It is not surprising, then, that women find indirect, and not necessarily "constructive," ways to communicate their anger (e.g., silence, crying). When women do express anger directly, they face their own and others' ridicule.

2.5 Older Women and Anger

Whether the findings of this extensive literature on women's anger apply to *older* women is unclear, as none of the investigators specifically focused on older women. The few studies that *have* focused on older women's anger experiences will be discussed following a review of the literature on older adults' emotional development and anger experiences.

2.5.1 Older Adults: The Image vs. The Reality

Our youth-oriented society holds very negative views of the aging process. Old age is “associated with systematic, individual decline and loss” (e.g., declining health and sensory capacity, widowhood, loss of income, reduced mobility, social isolation) (Hansson, Hogan, & Jones, 1984, p.200). Prior to the 1980s, gerontologists typically adopted this same “loss-deficit model of aging, which portrays the normative course of later life as a series of losses” (Knight, 1996, p.4). More recent studies of the normal aging process have found that later life includes the possibility of *growth* as well as decline; “rather than characterizing aging as a period of decline, research suggests that many older people maintain their abilities as well as developing new interests and accomplishments” (Zarit & Zarit, 1998, p.4). Novak (1988) argued that our views of old age as a time of weakness, sickness and dying are based primarily on fear and myths.

These fears are articulated in Betty Friedan’s (1993) description of the dread she felt as she turned 60:

When my friends threw a surprise party on my sixtieth birthday, I could have killed them all. Their toasts seemed hostile, insisting as they did that I publicly acknowledge reaching sixty, pushing me out of life, as it seemed, out of the race. Professionally, politically, personally, sexually...I was depressed for weeks after that birthday party... I could not face being sixty (Friedan, 1993, p.13).

Betty Friedan (author of *The Feminine Mystique*, 1963) was in her late fifties when she was approached, as a potential advocate, by the head of the National Institute on Aging. In an attempt to pique her interest in the problems of age, he explained that women are the majority of the old, yet “most of the policies and programs and research on age had been designed by and about and for men” (Friedan,

1993, p.16). Friedan reluctantly agreed to meet with older people to discuss their experiences, even though she dreaded the prospect of “wallowing in the dreariness of age” (1993, p.18).

In researching her book *The Fountain of Age*, Friedan (1993) spent several years going to conferences and seminars on aging. She claimed she was struck by the “predilection of gerontological experts for dealing with age only in terms of pathology” (p.24). She described her thoughts as she sat in a meeting at Harvard on “Ethical Issues in the Care of the Aged”:

Listening to these experts on aging talk about “them” – the problems of those sick, helpless, senile, incontinent, childlike, dependent old people, all alone, or draining the finances of their families, a burden on the Social Security system and the hospitals – I thought how different their concerns were from those of the women and men who had been telling me about surprising changes in their own lives since they turned sixty, seventy, eighty (Friedan, 1993, p.21).

As she continued to meet with vital men and women over 65, people who were breaking through conventional expectations of decline and deterioration in old age, Friedan discovered a significant gap between society’s and experts’ images of old people, and older men and women’s own experiences and views of themselves. Friedan suggested that our desperate pursuit of youth was blinding us (young and old) to the *possibilities* of age.

As she spoke with women in their seventies, Rountree (1999) discovered some of these possibilities. One of the themes throughout her conversations with these women was freedom from role constraints and others’ expectations. While some older women struggled with being “invisible,” others associated this invisibility with a sense of liberation, as illustrated by Betye Saar’s comments:

Gray (hair) makes you invisible. I can do and say anything I want because I'm invisible. In a way, that's not negative. There is a sort of release to being invisible. Who cares what I do? Who cares what I say? Who cares how I look? I can just do whatever I want (Rountree, 1999 p.9).

One of the women Rountree interviewed was Betty Friedan (who was 77 at the time). When asked what advice she would give to a younger woman in her late forties, Friedan responded:

What you can look forward to is liberation from limitations. You don't have to prove anything to anybody, do you? And you've fulfilled whatever roles were prescribed for you. If you've gotten married, if you've had kids, the kids are raised. So the rest of your life is just where you want to take it (Rountree, 1999, p.6).

Jenny Onyx, Rosemary Leonard, and Rosslyn Reed (1999) spoke about older women from their perspective as older women. They discussed the ageism and sexism that come together in our society to oppress older women. They challenged the dominant images of the older woman as white, middle-class, frail, dependent, and asexual. They also discussed the diversity among older women, pointing out that these women may or may not have been married, may or may not have had careers or children, may be wealthy or pensioners, come from different cultural backgrounds, and have different sexual orientations.

Onyx and her colleagues (1999) discussed the dominant images of older women in children's literature: the wicked witch and the doting grandmother. The wicked witch is an old woman who lives on her own and takes great delight in trapping and eating small children. We have equally vivid, but very different, images of what grandmothers "should" be like: "weren't old women meant to be quiet and gentle with soft, creaky voices? And they were meant to live in retirement homes away from everyone else, and smell of lavender water and blue rinses" (*Foxspell*, cited

in Onyx et al., 1999). Women who depart from this image are considered exceptional or eccentric (Onyx et al., 1999).

2.5.2 Emotional Development in Late Adulthood

Nearly all discussions of emotional development start – and stop – with childhood, despite the argument that “the most reasonable assumption to make – on both biological and psychological grounds ... is that emotional development continues throughout the life span” (Averill, 1984, p.30). Until relatively recently, little theory or research had been devoted to emotional development in adults (Carstensen & Turk-Charles, 1994; Cox et al., 1999; Gross, Carstensen, Pasupathi, Skorpen, Tsai, & Hsu, 1997), perhaps because the changes in affect beyond childhood are slow and presumably continuous (Averill, 1984). There is some evidence, however, that adults become more adept emotionally (e.g., making finer distinctions when appraising situations) (Averill, 1984), are better able to use expressive behaviour instrumentally (Malatesta & Izard, 1984), and are more aware of the need to modify their emotional expressions so as to be socially appropriate (Malatesta & Izard, 1984).

Whether adults continue to develop and master these competencies as they move into old age is unclear because “emotional development in the elder years is a sorely neglected topic” (Cox et al. 1999, p.50) in terms of both theory and research (Carstensen & Turk-Charles, 1994; Gross et al., 1997; Thomas, 2002). Carstensen, Pasupathi, Mayr, and Nesselroade (2003) suggested that emotional development was not studied in older adults until relatively recently due to “long-held presumptions that emotional functioning in later life parallels biological and cognitive functioning in adulthood and old age, namely levelling in late adolescence and early adulthood,

remaining reasonably stable in midlife and becoming dysregulated and rigid in old age” (p.644).

Popular stereotypes suggest that people become less emotional as they age (Gross et al., 1997). Indeed, for many years, researchers shared this belief that old age was “a time in life when emotions were dampened and poorly regulated” (Isaacowitz, Charles, & Carstensen, 1999). This traditional view of diminished emotionality in late life is reflected in the “maturational change model” which proposes that physiological changes directly diminish the strength of emotion in older adults (Gross et al., 1997). This model predicts a decrease in both positive and negative affect in old age. I have not found any empirical evidence to support this model.

Rather, several studies have found a pattern of age-related decreases in *negative* emotion, and *increases* in positive emotion (e.g., Gross et al., 1997). Gross et al. (1997) argued that this pattern “seems most consistent with the view that emotional experience is being selectively managed rather than forcibly diminished by changes in the physiological strength of emotion” (p.597). These authors argued that this pattern of decreased negative affect and increased positive affect best fits an “emotional control model” which predicts increasingly effective emotional control throughout adulthood. Much of the following empirical evidence supports this “emotional control model.”

Gross et al. (1997) reviewed a number of studies examining age and emotional experience. They found that participants in these studies typically represented a narrow range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. They were concerned that the primarily White middle-class participants of past studies might have shared cultural

stereotypes concerning emotion and aging, and might have responded on the basis of how they thought someone of their age *should* respond rather than making accurate statements about their actual behaviour and experience. In order to address this concern, these authors conducted four studies, with ethnically and culturally diverse samples, to examine age-related changes in emotional experience, expression and control. They found that, across different ethnic groups, age was associated with: decreased subjective experience of anger, sadness and fear; increased subjective experience of happiness; and increased emotional control.

One way older adults might minimize the experience of negative emotions and increase the experience of positive emotions is by selecting their interaction partners accordingly. Some theorists suggest that older individuals' decreased social activity reflects their decreased strength and energy, and their desire to withdraw from social roles (e.g., disengagement theory: Cumming & Henry, 1961, cited in Novak, 1988). Others explain the decline in social contacts as a function of older adults' tendency to become increasingly selective in their choices of social partners (Carstensen, 1995). The socioemotional selectivity theory suggests that perceptions of limited "time left" direct individuals' attention *toward* emotional goals, such as spending time with emotionally close social partners, and *away* from the goals of acquiring new information or spending time with interesting but unfamiliar people (Cartensen, 1995). Because time limitations are presumably more salient to older adults, they can be expected to "restrict their social circles to small but emotionally satisfying groups of friends and family members, thereby regulating their emotions by influencing the interpersonal situations they will experience" (Gross et al., 1997, p.597).

In order to test socioemotional selectivity theory, Carstensen, Gottman, and Levenson (1995) used an observational coding system to examine emotional behaviours expressed by middle-aged and older spouses during discussions of a marital problem. These authors proposed that “if older people do ‘manage’ social interactions toward the optimization of positive affect (as suggested by socioemotional selectivity theory), one should see evidence of this in the interactional dynamics surrounding discussion of emotionally charged topics” (p.140). Their hypothesis that older couples would express more positive emotions and fewer negative emotions during conflict discussions than middle-aged couples was supported: in older couples, the resolution of conflict was less emotionally negative (i.e., lower levels of anger, disgust, belligerence and whining) and more affectionate than middle-aged couples.

Birditt and Fingerman (2003) found additional support for socioemotional selectivity theory. Within structured interviews, participants (aged 13 to 99) were asked to describe the emotions they experienced during recent difficult situations with three close and three problematic social partners. Participants also rated the intensity and duration of their distress. Responses to open-ended questions were coded, categorized and subjected to quantitative analyses. Compared to adolescents (aged 13-16) and young adults (aged 20-29), older adults (aged 60-99) were less likely to report anger, and reported less intense aversive responses. Older participants also reported experiencing aversive reactions for a shorter duration than younger participants, but this age difference was found only among female participants; older women described shorter aversive reactions than younger women. Birditt and Fingerman (2003) argued that their findings were consistent with socioemotional selectivity theory, which

suggests that older people are more concerned with the maintenance of emotionally close relationships than younger people. They argued that older adults wish to maintain harmony in their relationships, and therefore are less likely to report feeling anger or intense distress in those relationships.

Carstensen and her colleagues (2003) used an experience-sampling procedure to examine age differences in emotional experience over the adult life span. One hundred and eighty-four participants (aged 18 to 94) were prompted five times a day, for one week, to record how they were feeling at that moment. On a 7-point scale that ranged from 1 (not at all) to 7 (extremely), participants indicated the degree to which they were feeling each of 19 emotions or feeling states (e.g., anger, happiness, fear). Carstensen et al. (2003) found no age differences in the reported frequency or intensity of positive emotional experience, nor did they find age differences in the reported *intensity* of negative emotions. They did, however, find that age was associated with the *frequency* of reported negative affect; negative emotions declined in frequency until approximately age 60, at which point the decline ceased.

Malatesta and Kalnok (1984) also found few age differences in reporting of positive and negative emotions. These authors examined the affective experiences of young (17-34), middle-aged (35-56) and older adults (57-88). Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire that included 40 Likert-type and scaled unipolar response items and seven open-ended questions. The open-ended questions asked respondents to report recent events that elicited the following seven emotions: happiness, excitement/interest, sadness, anxiety, anger, shame, and disgust. They were asked to describe what happened, what they felt, and how they dealt with their feelings.

Unfortunately, the richness of those descriptions was lost when they were subjected to quantitative analyses (e.g., how many “emotion words” were used in these accounts). Among their sample of 240 white middle-class participants, these authors found more age similarities than differences. Older participants did not report any greater inhibition of emotion than the younger participants, nor did older participants report that their emotions were less intense than they remembered in younger years. Older participants were also just as likely as members of the younger groups to cite interpersonal relationships and the behaviour of others as important elicitors of their feelings.

Malatesta and Kalnok’s (1984) most striking finding was that “conventional constraints on the overt display of affect appear to have less impact on older vs. younger individuals” (p.301). Older participants, more than young and middle-aged participants, agreed that people their age should conceal their feelings of anger, sadness, happiness, and disgust. While recognizing, and apparently endorsing, these age-specific display rules, behavioural indicators suggested that older participants were less likely to abide by these rules than their younger counterparts. Older participants were less likely than either younger or middle-aged participants to monitor and inhibit their emotional expressions.

This finding is consistent with Neugarten’s (1977, cited in Hansson et al., 1984) assertion that old age brings with it an increase in interiority. Interiority refers to “a general decrease in one’s attention to the demands and evaluations of others” (Hansson et al., 1984, p.205). This decreased concern for others’ evaluations coincides with a reduction in role expectations. “As old people have fewer responsibilities, there

are fewer defined expectations or standards for their behavior” (Hansson et al., 1984, p.202), including their expressive behaviour.

2.5.2.1 Anger Experiences in Late Adulthood

Fisher, Reid, and Melendez (1989) interviewed 55 older adults (aged 60-79 years) about anger triggers in specific relationships. Participants were asked to tell stories about situations provoking anger in their relationships with their adult children, and with their peers. Their responses were classified into nine distinct categories and subjected to quantitative analyses. Adult children triggered participants’ anger when they: (1) failed to adhere to family and social rules (e.g., doing family chores; avoiding alcohol and drugs); (2) failed to accept parental control (e.g., questioned parents’ decision-making authority); and (3) failed to live up to role expectations (e.g., as parents themselves, as professionals). Peers triggered participants’ anger when they: (1) were envious (e.g., begrudged their material possessions); and (2) failed to successfully adapt to the aging process (e.g., becoming “senile;” failing to heed medical advice). These findings lend support to Malatesta and Kalnok’s (1984) finding that older adults are just as likely as young or middle-aged adults to cite interpersonal relationships, and the behaviour of others, as important elicitors of their feelings.

Stoner and Spencer (1987) examined the experience and expression of anger among young (21-39), middle-aged (40-59), and older adults (60-83). They administered the Anger Expression Scale to 150 participants. This scale has participants indicate how often they behave in a particular manner when they feel “angry or furious.” Participants use a 4-point scale to indicate the frequency with

which they engage in these behaviours (e.g., “I say nasty things”): almost never, sometimes, often, almost always. Stoner and Spencer (1987) found no differences between the three age groups (young, middle-aged, and old) in terms of the *experience* of anger, but the young adult group did report *expressing* their feelings of anger more than the old group. The authors concluded that “the experience of anger appears to be stable over the life-span, but the expression of anger decreases with old age” (Stoner & Spencer, 1987, p.492). This finding contradicts Malatesta and Kalnok’s (1984) finding that older adults were less likely than younger adults to inhibit their emotional expressions.

2.5.2.2 Summary

As earlier stated, I found no empirical support for the traditional view of diminished emotionality in late life. Rather than diminishing with age, positive affect seems to remain stable (Carstensen et al., 2003; Malatesta & Kalnok, 1984) or increase with age (Carstensen et al. 1995; Gross et al., 1997). On the other hand, negative affect (including anger) seems to remain stable (Carstensen et al., 2003; Malatesta & Kalnok, 1984; Stoner & Spencer, 1987) or decrease with age (Birditt & Fingerman, 2003; Carstensen et al., 1995; Gross et al., 1997). Whether older adults are more or less likely to express anger, when they do experience it, is unclear: Malatesta and Kalnok (1984) found that older adults were less likely to monitor and inhibit their emotional expressions, including anger; whereas Stoner and Spencer (1987) found that older adults were less likely to express anger than younger adults. It seems there are mixed findings regarding older adults’ relative freedom from anger, and their relative freedom to express anger, when it is experienced.

2.5.3 Studies of Older Women's Anger Experiences

Cox et al. (1999) wanted to examine the “role of socialization and culture in shaping [women's] expression and experience of anger over the lifespan” (p.xi). They found, however, that “virtually nothing” (p.217) had been written about older women's anger experiences.

They conducted focus group interviews with four groups of women, including a group of older Jewish women in their 60s and 70s. These women were asked about how they are viewed when they become angry. Unfortunately, Cox et al. (1999) did not report any extensive analysis of their focus group with older women. One woman suggested that “most men are put off when they encounter an angry woman” (p.171), but the women tended to focus on their experiences in the work force (vs. with husbands or family) and the expectations that influenced them to hide or disguise their anger at work. Their comments included: “in the era when we worked you played it real low key,” “women in business were not respected if they were angry, aggressive,” “you were expected to be a lady at all times” (p.185). The women believed that younger women are not restricted by the same expectations today. “I mean today it's a different thing, but not in our time” (p.185).

As earlier mentioned, Thomas (1993) had more than 500 women (aged 25-66) complete an extensive test battery to explore health consequences of women's anger. Thomas (1993) grouped respondents by age (34 or less; 35-39; 40-44; 45-49; 50-54; 55 or more) and conducted ANOVA comparisons on anger dimensions. She found significant age differences on seven of the nine dimensions, which suggested to Thomas (1993) that “age is an important demographic characteristic to consider in

anger research” (p.56). Older women (age 55 and over) scored lower on overall trait anger scale, angry reaction subscale, angry temperament subscale, cognitive anger, and anger-out (i.e., anger expression). Conversely, older women scored higher on anger-in (i.e., anger suppression).

Rather than focus specifically on older women’s anger experiences, Weitzman and Weitzman (2000) examined the negotiation strategies used by older women in interpersonal conflict. These authors asked 35 older women (60 years and older, mean age = 75) to describe an interpersonal conflict experienced recently, and how they responded to it. Responses were coded using a 4-level model of interpersonal negotiation strategies, ranging from “impulsive, egocentric fight or flight” to “mutual collaborative negotiations” (p.44).

Weitzman and Weitzman (2000) suspected that “the current generation of older women” was socialized to be submissive in interpersonal conflicts. Their results only partially supported this assumption. They found that many of their participants used direct, expressive strategies to deal with interpersonal conflict; these women tried to explain their own position and to persuade the other person to change his or her mind. And yet, many of those who did express their point of view in conflict situations ended up acquiescing to the demands of the other person. They suggested that this combination of expressive and submissive responses might reflect two personal goals of older adults: independence, and the maintenance of harmonious relationships (Strough, Berg, & Sansone, 1996, cited in Weitzman & Weitzman, 2000).

One of the few empirical studies specifically examining older women and anger was conducted by Bleiker, van der Ploeg, Mook, and Kleijn (1993), who

surveyed 4,302 Dutch women between the ages of 44 and 89 (mean age = 57). These women completed questionnaires measuring trait-anxiety, trait-depression, and trait-anger (proneness to anger). While Thomas (1993) found older women had lower trait-anger scores, Bleiker et al. (1993) found that age and trait-anger were *not* significantly correlated.

I have found only one qualitative study of older women's anger experiences: Minick and Gueldner (1995) explored the experience and expressions of conflict and anger in nine women between the ages of 62 and 79. In one-to-one interviews, participants were asked to describe general experiences about conflict, then specific personal instances of conflict. Participants were asked directly about anger only if they did not spontaneously mention anger associated with conflict.

Sixty short stories (or "codes") were extracted from the transcripts and grouped according to common meanings to form categories. These categories were further distilled into three "expression themes" and one "feeling theme."

The expression themes that emerged included: 1) avoidance; 2) covert retaliation; and 3) no acknowledgement. These findings are consistent with the literature on women and anger reviewed earlier; women tended to avoid expressing anger directly. Minick and Gueldner (1995) discussed three potential explanations for their findings: 1) these women were socialized to suppress anger; 2) these women valued their relationships more than "winning" the conflict; and 3) women in this age cohort have "outgrown" the need to express anger.

The feelings participants associated with conflict and anger "were extremely negative, without exception" (Minick & Gueldner, 1995, p.80). Conflict and anger

were seen as disruptive to relationships, and were associated with feelings of isolation and estrangement.

2.6 Context and Rationale for the Present Study

Clearly, little is known about older women's anger. There are mixed findings regarding their relative freedom from anger, and their relative freedom to express anger, when it is experienced. In addition to contributing to this literature in terms of *what* older women say about their experiences and expressions of anger, more importantly, the current investigation will focus on *how* older women talk about anger in the context of a research interview.

This emphasis on participants' own words is conspicuously absent from studies of women's, older adults', and older women's anger experiences (Bleiker et al., 1993; Malatesta & Kalnok, 1984; Stoner & Spencer, 1987; Thomas, 1993). In these investigations, participants were asked to rate the frequency and intensity of their anger under different circumstances, and their tendency to engage in specific behaviours when angry. Their response options were limited and pre-determined by the researchers. Little is known about the relevance of these options for older women.

Even when participants were asked to share stories and descriptions of their own anger experiences (e.g., open-ended questions, interviews, taped conversations), their responses were coded, categorized and subjected to quantitative analyses (Birditt & Fingerman, 2003; Fisher, Reid, & Melendez, 1989; Jack, 1999, 2001; Malatesta & Kalnok, 1984; Minick & Gueldner, 1995; Thomas, 1993; Weitzman & Weitzman, 2000). Such data management techniques, while useful in addressing certain questions, typically obscure what participants have to say and how they engage with

the topic of anger.

Campbell and Muncer's (1987) study was an exception. These authors looked at *how* young men and women told stories about their own experiences and expressions of anger. They considered what participants were doing as they were telling their stories (e.g., justifying), and the discursive strategies that were used (e.g., pre-emptive self-condemnation). Though these authors did not employ a formal discourse analytic approach, they did consider the functional and constructive nature of language.

The current study extends the literature on anger by treating the anger-talk of older women as the object of investigation. Specifically, this study sheds light on how anger is co-constructed by an interviewer and older women interviewees, and on what is accomplished by these constructions.

3. METHOD

3.1 Research Paradigm

Well before I was aware of it, or asked to articulate it, I was operating within a particular framework. This framework was guiding my entire approach to this research project – the questions I was asking, the methods I had chosen to address those questions, the types of information that I would consider as “data,” and how I planned to make sense of these data. This framework, or worldview, is reflected in my research paradigm.

A paradigm is defined as a basic belief system that guides an investigator, “not only in choices of method but in ontologically and epistemologically fundamental ways” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p.105). An investigator’s research paradigm is revealed by his or her responses to three fundamental and interconnected questions: (1) the ontological question – what is the nature of reality and, therefore, what is there that can be known about it? (Guba & Lincoln, 1994); (2) the epistemological question – what is the relationship of the investigator to what is investigated? (Smith & Heshusius, 1986); and (3) the methodological question – how can the investigator go about finding out whatever he or she believes can be known? (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

My training within the positivist tradition would suggest the following responses to these questions: (1) there is an objective reality that is independent of the investigator and his or her values and theoretical framework, and this reality can be

described as it really is; (2) the investigator views natural phenomena as they happen and records them objectively - he or she does not influence the phenomena or vice versa; and (3) in order to test hypotheses empirically, possible confounding variables must be controlled or manipulated.

Following my Master's thesis I found myself feeling dissatisfied with these positivist assumptions. I questioned how *meaningful* my statistically significant results were. I felt disconnected from my participants and felt I had learned little about their life experiences. My attempts at being value-neutral, objective and unbiased left me feeling disengaged from the entire research endeavour.

I knew that I wanted to adopt a very different approach when conducting my dissertation research. I wanted to meet and connect with participants. Instead of using restrictive response categories or rating scales, I wanted to hear about their experiences in their own words. I wanted to see how participants would construct those experiences.

The current project most strongly adheres to a constructionist epistemology, while incorporating aspects of the hermeneutic or interpretive tradition. I assume there is no objective social reality. Rather, I assume there are multiple and constructed realities. I recognize my role in shaping the research project, as I bring my values, experiences, thoughts and feelings into my relationships with participants, the questions I ask them, and my interpretations of their responses. My interpretations are just that – interpretations. They reflect my understanding of participants' accounts. Finally, I believe that participants' accounts of their experiences are co-constructions. My questions and responses shape their accounts, just as their accounts shape my

questions and responses. Because I was interested in how anger was constructed in participants' accounts, I selected discourse analysis to analyse those accounts.

3.2 Overview of Discourse Analysis

In the current study, I have borrowed Potter and Wetherell's (1987) open and inclusive definition of discourse as: "all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds" (p.7). The discourse examined in the current investigation was derived from interviews.

There is no one, consensual, definition or approach to discourse analysis (DA). For the purpose of this investigation, I have adopted formulations of DA proposed by Potter and Wetherell (1987), Potter and Edwards (2001), Wetherell, Taylor, and Yates (2001), and Potter (2003). There is some agreement among these authors that discourse analysis is "the study of how talk and texts are used to perform actions" (Potter, 2003, p.73).

Potter and his colleagues are social psychologists who examine social life and social interaction through the study of social texts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Their application of ideas from discourse analysis to central topics in social psychology has resulted in the development of a new field of study: discursive social psychology.

Traditionally, social psychology has assumed that language is simply descriptive. However, Potter and Wetherell (1987) argued that "social texts do not merely *reflect* or *mirror* objects, events and categories pre-existing in the social and natural world. Rather, they actively *construct* a version of those things. They do not just describe things, they *do* things" (p.6). Their argument highlights two of the main theoretical features of discourse: discourse is constructed; and discourse is action-

oriented (Potter & Edwards, 2001). Discourse is constructed in the sense that it is built from various resources (e.g., words, categories, ideas), and it is *constructive* in the sense that it is used to construct a version of the world, events, and actions (Potter, 2003). Discourse is action-oriented in the sense that it is used to perform social actions. In other words, people use their language to *do* things, including: ordering and requesting, persuading and accusing (Wetherell et al., 2001). Potter and Edwards (2001) highlighted a third theoretical feature of discourse: it is situated. In other words, talk is embedded in a particular sequence of interaction (e.g., question and answer) and a particular context (e.g., research interview). Discourse can only be understood within this context.

3.3 Research Questions

The focus of the current investigation is the constructed and action-oriented nature of discourse. Two central questions are explored: (1) how is anger constructed in participants' discourse? and (2) what is accomplished by these constructions? The latter question relates to the *function* of language; what are participants *doing* when they make anger claims? The construction and function of language will be understood within the *context* of the research interview, recognizing the co-constructed nature of the anger-talk in this context.

3.4 Interviewees

Discourse analysis differs from conventional research practices in a number of significant ways, but Potter and Wetherell (1987) argued that discourse analysis diverges *most* radically from the traditional view in terms of its approach to sample size. Because discourse analysis is an extremely labour-intensive approach, requiring

reading and re-reading large bodies of transcripts, these authors argue that large sample sizes can actually jeopardize the quality of the analysis: “there is a danger here of getting bogged down in too much data and not being able to let the linguistic detail emerge from the mountains of text” (p.161).

Beyond research economy, the *focus* of discourse analysis makes large sample sizes unnecessary. Because discourse analysts are interested in language use, rather than the individuals generating the language, and “because a large number of linguistic patterns are likely to emerge from a few people, small samples or a few interviews are generally quite adequate for investigating an interesting and practically important range of phenomena” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.161).

Because there is no “natural” or clear point at which sampling is considered complete, Potter and Wetherell (1987) argued “it is simply a case of giving a clear and detailed description of the nature of the material one is analyzing and its origins” (p.162). I have, therefore, provided some descriptive information about my sample, and how interviewees were recruited.

Seven older women were recruited in one of three ways: posters advertising the study (see Appendix A) were displayed at the YWCA on their senior activity board, at the Memory Clinic, and in the common areas of a seniors’ apartment; I was invited to say a few words about the study at the Senior Memory Writer’s Club meeting, as well as three University of Saskatchewan Extension classes offered to seniors; and I asked friends to forward an introductory letter to any older women who might be interested in participating. As Reiser (1999) did, I emphasized that I was hoping to talk to ordinary women (not necessarily angry women) about their

experiences with anger. Women who showed an interest in participating were sent a letter describing the study (see Appendix B).

Interviewees' ages ranged from 60 to 81 years (mean age = 71 years). Most interviewees had been born, and lived most of their lives, in Saskatchewan; all were of European descent. Only one interviewee was still married; others were separated, divorced, or widowed. Only one interviewee had no children. Most interviewees had worked outside the home, but only two were still working. All interviewees were living independently at the time of the interview, and all were residents of Saskatoon, Saskatchewan.

3.5 Interview Procedure

There is some disagreement about the merits of analysing “naturally occurring” discourse versus discourse that is instigated by the researcher (e.g., in interviews). Wood and Kroger (2000) suggest that “interview discourse is ... restricted in that it is affected by the interests and formulations of the researcher” (p.57) and they encourage discourse analysts to focus on naturally occurring discourse. While acknowledging the advantages of using naturalistic records and transcripts of conversations, Potter and Wetherell (1987) point out that “interviews have the virtue of allowing the researcher room for active intervention” (p.163). Conducting interviews gave me the opportunity to ask a sample of older women a number of questions about anger, and examine their talk about this relatively sensitive topic.

In a structured interview, the interviewer asks each respondent a series of pre-established questions in a standardized manner so that all respondents are asked the same set of questions in the same order or sequence. Respondents are typically

presented with a limited set of response categories. Clearly, “there is very little flexibility in the way questions are asked or answered in the structured interview setting” (Fontana & Frey, 1994, p.363).

Semi-structured interviews afford both the researcher and the respondent greater flexibility than the structured interview. While the researcher does bring a set of questions into a semi-structured interview, he or she is not concerned with the order in which these questions are asked. In fact, the interviewer may not even ask all of the pre-established questions, choosing instead to probe interesting and unanticipated areas that arise in the interview. In a semi-structured interview, the interviewer’s questions are phrased in a general and nondirective manner (McCracken, 1988), allowing the respondent to tell her own story in her own way (McCracken, 1988; Smith, 1995). The respondent, therefore, shares more closely in the direction the interview takes, introducing issues that reflect her own interests and concerns – issues that the interviewer may not have considered (Smith, 1995). In relinquishing much of her “control” over the interview process, the interviewer is rewarded with a richer and more detailed picture of how the respondent sees her world.

Brown, Debold, Tappan, and Gilligan (1991) adopted a semi-structured interview format when they asked adolescent girls to describe a moral conflict they had experienced. They “partially assured the coherence of such stories... by using a sequence of questions about moral conflict and choice” (p.31). However, they did not use these questions in a rigid manner to dictate the flow of the interview. They “let go of the self-imposed pressure to cover every question on the interview protocol” (Brown & Gilligan, 1992, p.19), choosing instead to use the questions as “openings,”

and to move where the girls led them. I used a very similar semi-structured interview format in the present study.

Interviewees were given the choice of having the interview in their home or at the University of Saskatchewan. Three interviews were conducted in their homes, one was conducted in the interviewee's work place, and three were conducted in a small interview room in the Psychology Department at the University of Saskatchewan.

All interviewees agreed to have their interviews tape-recorded. Only one interviewee commented on the recorder, claiming that she would try to ignore it: "now I I won't think about this being recorded or what's going on- anything I answer you will just be as I would as I would talk to anyone without thinking about hah – you know what I mean?" It is possible, of course, that other interviewees were also quite conscious of the tape recorder but did not mention it. The tape recorder served as yet another reminder that this was not a "normal" conversation, and its presence may have influenced my own as well as interviewees' talk.

I began each interview by introducing myself and the research project, and providing interviewees with a chance to ask me any questions, or discuss any of their concerns. I then went through the consent form with them (see Appendix C), and again asked if they had any questions. In the interest of establishing rapport and collecting basic demographic information, I asked interviewees a series of questions about their families, careers, and current living arrangements.

Because I was using a semi-structured interview format, I did not ask the same questions in every interview, but there were some questions that I asked during most of the interviews, including the following: "*As you know, I am interested in learning*

about older women's anger experiences. Can you think of a time, recently, when you felt angry?" (opening question); "can you think of a time, in your childhood, when someone in your family felt angry?"; "do you think that the way you experience or express anger has changed over time?"; "Some older women would say that they feel more free to express anger than they did when they were younger. Others, of course, would say the exact opposite – that they feel less free to communicate those types of feelings. Have you noticed any difference in how you feel about expressing or communicating anger now that you're an older woman?"; "One author spoke to a number of women in their seventies. One woman was quoted as saying: 'gray hair makes you invisible. I can do and say anything I want because I'm invisible. In a way, that's not negative. There's a sort of release to being invisible. Who cares what I do? Who cares what I say? Who cares how I look? I can just do whatever I want.' Do you ever feel this way, as an older woman?"

In conventional research practice, the sole focus of analysis would be interviewees' responses to these questions. From a discursive perspective, the researcher's *questions* are just as much a topic of analysis as the interviewee's answers, as they are seen as active and constructive rather than passive and neutral (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). My own questions and responses are examined along with interviewees' questions and responses, as language is seen as a co-construction between myself and interviewees.

Before concluding the interview I asked each interviewee if there was anything she wanted to add, or if she had any questions for me. I explained that the interview would be transcribed, and that she would receive a copy of her transcript, along with a

“transcript release form,” (see Appendix D) and invited to share her reactions and feedback; she would also be sent a brief overview of my initial thoughts and reactions to her transcript, and again invited to share her feedback. All transcript release forms were returned, and no changes were requested. In closing each interview, I asked the interviewee if she would be open to a second interview if I had further questions or wanted to clarify points from the first interview; all agreed to participate in a second interview if necessary. Only one interviewee was asked to participate in a second interview, and this was done because she had to leave the first interview before it was completed. Finally, as instructed by the university ethics committee, I gave each interviewee a list of local counselling resources in case discussing anger had upset them or evoked painful memories. None of the interviewees had gotten particularly upset or emotional during the course of the interview, and so they seemed surprised by the suggestion that they might need to seek counselling after our conversation. Nevertheless, they graciously thanked me for the information.

3.6 Transcription

Rather than wait until all of the interviews had been completed, I transcribed interviews as they were being conducted. Typically, I was able to complete transcribing each interview before conducting the next one. I chose this process because I wanted to send interviewees their transcripts in a timely manner (typically within two weeks following the interview), and I wanted to transcribe each interview while it was still relatively “fresh” in my mind.

As the sole transcriber, I became very familiar with the spoken discourse as I transcribed each interview. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) stressed, transcribing

discourse goes beyond “putting the words down on paper” (p.165). It is a constructive process that involves making decisions about how to present the material.

One important decision to be made during the transcribing process is the level of detail to include. Potter and Wetherell (1987) advised discourse analysts to consider what information is required from the transcript and at what level the analysis will proceed. They warned that highly detailed transcribing can be very time-consuming, and suggested that “for many sorts of research questions, the fine details of timing and intonation are not crucial, and indeed they can interfere with the readability of the transcript” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.166). In the interest of keeping transcripts readable and manageable, I have used a modified version of Gail Jefferson’s notational system (Wood & Kroger, 2000; see Appendix E). My modifications included limiting the paralinguistic features captured in the transcribed discourse, and using untimed rather than timed pauses. Finally, to protect the anonymity of interviewees’ responses, pseudonyms were used for each interviewee as well as those individuals mentioned by name during the interviews.

3.7 Coding: Selecting Anger Discourse

After transcribing seven interviews, I was left with over 400 pages of text. Fortunately, Potter and Wetherell (1987) offered some guidance in terms of my first step: coding. They explained that the goal of coding “is not to find results but to squeeze an unwieldy body of discourse into manageable chunks. It is an analytic preliminary preparing the way for a much more intensive study of the material culled through the selective coding process” (p.167). They advised that coding has the “pragmatic rather than analytic goal of collecting together instances for examination”

(p.167) and should be done as inclusively as possible.

Because my interest was in the construction of anger-talk, I went through the transcripts and identified all anger discourse. As Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggested, I was very inclusive at this point; I identified the use of any terms associated with anger (e.g., frustrated, mad, annoyed, angry, upset), and metaphorical expressions of anger (e.g., blew my stack, exploded, short fuse). I also pulled out interviewees' reports of their own and others' anger experiences, and any mention of conflict or disagreements, regardless of the nature of the conflict or the relationship involved.

3.8 Data Analysis

Potter and Wetherell (1987) suggested that “there is no mechanical procedure for producing findings from an archive of transcript” (p.168). Analysis involves a lot of careful reading and re-reading as one tries to make sense of the discourse. These authors suggested that there are two closely related phases of analysis: (1) searching for pattern in the data; and (2) examination of function and consequence. The “pattern” will involve variability (differences in the content or form of accounts) and consistency (features shared by accounts). The second phase addresses a theoretical “given” in discourse analysis: “people’s talk fulfils many functions and has varying effects” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.168). This phase involves developing and checking claims (conventionally hypotheses) about the functions and effects, through a search for evidence in the discourse (Wood & Kroger, 2000).

I found Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) description of the analysis process a helpful place to start, but I did not find the process to be a linear or sequential one. I

started my analysis with what they identified as “phase 2.” Because this was my first attempt at using discourse analysis, I started by developing a list of potential discursive strategies identified by Edwards and Potter (1992), Potter and Wetherell (1987), and Wood and Kroger (2000). These included, for example, “normalization” (constructing events as commonplace or routine), and using “tentative discourse” (to hedge or water-down a direct anger claim). As I became more familiar with these terms, I began to look at the transcripts through a new lens: rather than focusing on what was being said (i.e., the content), I began to focus on what was being *done*, or the strategies being used.

After identifying a number of strategies being used by interviewees, I noted the similarities and differences in the strategies used (i.e., the emerging pattern). For example, several interviewees positioned anger in the past, but one positioned her anger in the present; several interviewees used the metaphor of explosion to describe their anger responses, but they varied in how they evaluated these “explosions.”

Once I had a clearer picture of the strategies being used, I looked at the transcripts through a different lens, asking “what is accomplished by these strategies?” At this point I generated a number of possible answers to the “what is accomplished” question, including: a construction of self as in control, and non-confrontational; an evaluation of one’s own anger responses as wrong or inappropriate; the placement of anger in the past. Overall, I found the strategies were being used to minimize or distance anger in some way, and to present oneself as a certain kind of person. I then tried to step back and ask: what does all of this tell me about how these women are constructing anger in their discourse?

3.9 Evaluation of Interpretations

It is not useful or meaningful to evaluate qualitative research using traditional conceptions of validity and reliability. A number of investigators have proposed alternative criteria, or guidelines, for establishing the credibility of qualitative research (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999; Stiles, 1993). I invite readers to examine my own methods and results through this alternative lens.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) stressed the importance of presenting the analysis of discourse in a way that allows the reader to assess the researcher's interpretations. To this end, they suggested that "a representative set of examples from the area of interest must be included along with a detailed interpretation which links analytic claims to specific parts or aspects of the extracts" (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.172). Stiles (1993) similarly argued that abstract interpretations must be "grounded," or linked with more concrete observations. The presentation of my analysis includes several excerpts from the interview transcripts, along with detailed interpretations of those excerpts. These excerpts "allow appraisal of the fit between the data and (my) understanding of them; they also allow readers to conceptualize possible alternative meanings and understandings" (Elliott et al., 1999, p.222).

In the interest of owning their own perspective, and situating their interpretations, qualitative researchers are expected to disclose their "expectations for the study, preconceptions, values, and orientation, including any theoretical comments" (Stiles, 1993, p.602). They are also expected to describe personal experiences or training that is relevant to the subject matter (Elliott et al., 1999). Throughout this document I describe my "training" as a peacekeeper and my training

as a conflict management facilitator, I outline the research paradigm that shaped my questions and interpretations, and my assumptions or “predictions” about interviewees’ accounts. Having my orientation in mind helps readers put my interpretations in perspective (Stiles, 1993).

Stiles (1993) asserted that “in contrast to the idealized detachment sometimes advocated in received-view research, qualitative research seems facilitated by immersion in the material” (p.605). In my case, this immersion involved reading and re-reading transcripts, identifying promising excerpts, reading these excerpts through a number of different lenses, noting ideas and questions, moving back and forth between emerging interpretations and the text. I certainly established an “intimate familiarity” (Stiles, 1993, p.604) with interviewees’ anger-talk.

Finally, interpretations are judged by their coherence. Coherence includes “comprehensiveness of the elements to be interpreted and the relations between elements” (Stiles, 1993, p.608). Readers assess the coherence of a particular interpretation by asking: “does it hang together?” In order to make sense of interviewees’ anger-talk, I organized their discursive work into two main strategies: minimizing and distancing. I claim that these strategies were used to construct anger in one of three ways: as controllable, past, and forgotten. I have tried to present enough of the “raw data” so that readers can assess the fit between the data and these claims, and judge the coherence of my proposed framework.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Minimizing Anger

With few exceptions, the women worked to construct themselves as relatively calm and composed. Rather than make direct claims to this effect, however, they contrasted themselves with others whom they presented as more angry or volatile. When the women did report expressing anger, they downplayed the impact of this anger by assuring me that no real harm was done.

4.1.1 Use of Contrast

Interviewees made very few direct claims to establish that they were not “angry women.” Instead, they constructed themselves as calm and composed by indirectly comparing themselves with “others” who were depicted as more angry or “quick-tempered.”

In the following excerpt, Sarah contrasts her own hypothetical response with that of an unnamed stranger (see Appendix E for transcription conventions). Throughout the interview Sarah claims that she cannot think of any anger episodes. As if to establish that she is not *completely* unfamiliar with anger, in the following excerpt Sarah claims that she has “seen people angry you know, I’ve seen people really angry” (l. 1). However, the anger that she claims to have witnessed is fairly innocuous: it was not directed towards her, and it involved strangers rather than loved ones (ll. 1-2). As she did throughout the interview, in this excerpt Sarah talks about how she “might” have responded to a hypothetical anger episode, rather than how she *did* respond to a

“real” anger episode: “if the same thing happened to me I might...” (ll. 2-3).

Excerpt 1

- 1 Sarah: I I’ve seen people angry you know, I’ve seen people really angry at people
2 in a store, maybe the clerk you know has done something and if the same thing
3 happened to me, I might be what I would call upset but I would not be angry, or I
4 wouldn’t (pause) be making a fuss over it=
5 Catherine: =*Mmhmmm*=
6 S: =If it upset me I’d just quietly come home upset
7 C: *Right. Yeah.*

Sarah’s language is tentative as she describes what her reaction might be if she found herself in a similar situation: “I might be what I would call upset” (l. 3). Her language is more declarative when describing what she would *not* do: “I would not be angry” (l. 3). As she does elsewhere in the interview Sarah uses semantic distancing, making an explicit distinction between being “upset” and being “angry.” The use of the word “or” following her statement “I would not be angry” tempers this claim, as if suggesting: “even if I did feel angry, I would not make a fuss.” Sarah implies that the angry strangers’ behaviour involved “making a fuss.” This description conjures an image of a petulant child throwing a tantrum, or calling attention to herself. By claiming that she would *not* “be making a fuss,” Sarah suggests that her own response would be more controlled, contained, and possibly more mature; “I’d just quietly come home upset” (l. 6).

In the following excerpt, Sarah compares herself with those who have “quick tempers” (ll. 9-10). Again, Sarah uses this comparison to indirectly present herself as

composed and level-headed.

Excerpt 2

- 1 Sarah: And I guess I've learned that (pause) you you're uh, if you get really upset
2 and mad yourself and have it inside, you're just hurting yourself.
- 3 Catherine: *Hmmm*
- 4 S: You, and I think you can do that to the degree that you're not being
5 reasonable?
- 6 C: *Mmhmm*
- 7 S: That you're you're not thinking (pause) quick.
- 8 C: *Yeah.*
- 9 S: I, I'm not quick to react I never was you know, some people have quick
10 tempers=
- 11 C: =*Yes*=
- 12 S: =And I never did have a quick temper
- 13 C: *Yeah*
- 14 S: I had a brother that was quick-tempered. But, uh, in fact I had two that were
15 maybe fairly quick-tempered but but I was never (pause) I never reacted quickly
16 to something
- 17 C: *Mmhmm. (pause) How would you characterize your reaction then if it wasn't*
18 *sort of [snapped fingers]*
- 19 S: (Pause) I'm more liable to think about it you know an hour or two later, it
20 would annoy me that that happened

Sarah suggests she is about to reveal a lesson learned from her own experience:

“I guess I’ve learned” (l. 1). However, her use of the pronoun “you” (l. 1) creates some distance, effectively shifting the focus to people in general rather than what Sarah has learned about herself or her own anger experiences. Her use of the pronoun “you” rather than “I” leaves open the possibility that Sarah has merely witnessed, rather than actually experienced, the destructive consequences of anger held inside (ll. 1-2).

In this excerpt, Sarah does not speak of anger as a separate entity that is outside of one’s control (Lakoff, 1987); she does not claim that “it will hurt you.” Instead, she claims that the person who gets upset and has anger inside is “just hurting” him or herself (l. 2). Sarah’s talk suggests that she holds this hypothetical angry individual responsible for his or her own pain or distress. She presents this person as an active agent who chooses to have anger inside. In addition, Sarah’s use of the word “just” here implies that hurting oneself is all that an individual accomplishes when he or she has anger inside.

Sarah’s claim that having anger inside can impede one’s ability to be reasonable and ‘think quick’ is made more tentative by her use of the modal expression “I think” (l. 4), and her rising inflection on the word “reasonable” (l. 5) leaves me wondering whether this is a question or a statement.

Sarah claims that she is not “quick to react” (l. 9). She strengthens this claim with an “extreme case formulation” (Pomerantz, 1986) (never) to establish this as an enduring quality: “I never was you know” (l. 9). In order to establish that this quality is unique or noteworthy, she brings in nameless “others” as a contrast: “some people have quick tempers. And I never did have a quick temper” (ll. 9-12). As if recognizing that

the use of a more specific and familiar foil would be more convincing, Sarah claims that one of her brothers was quick-tempered. She uses more tentative language when she concedes that actually two of her brothers “were maybe fairly quick-tempered” (ll. 14-15). As reluctant as she seems to label her brothers in this manner, Sarah does not qualify this statement by saying that her brothers were quick-tempered at times, or on occasion. Simply stating that they “were quick-tempered” implies an enduring behaviour pattern or disposition (Edwards, 1999).

Like Sarah, Margaret contrasts her own anger responses with those of loved ones in order to present herself as relatively calm and composed. In the following excerpt, Margaret compares herself with her youngest brother who is described as having a “short fuse” (l. 13).

Excerpt 3

- 1 Catherine: *Ok. Can you think of any time, I'm just interested uh, cuz you said you*
2 *didn't have any drinkers in your family but can you think of a time when you were*
3 *growing up, a time when someone was angry=*
4 Margaret: =Oh, with all these nine kids! We're nine kids in our family!
5 C: [*Oh wow*
6 M: [I'm sure we had some. I'm sure that I had lots of angry moments but
7 C: *Can you remember any, or think of how that was dealt with in your household?*
8 M: (long pause) You know such a difference in kids aren't there? I remember how
9 uh (pause) I, my youngest brother's just like a (pause) fuse you know?
10 C: *Mmhmm=*
11 M: =He's the one that gets angry over nothin (pause)

- 12 C: *And he was always [like that as a child?*
- 13 M: [Short short fuse. Yeah
- 14 C: *Yeah.*
- 15 M: And I think maybe I think maybe I have a natural something in me that says
- 16 “it’s not worth getting mad at” ((lowered voice)) I think maybe. How important is
- 17 it? To fight? (pause) I was right in the middle of the family and I always was a
- 18 happy child.
- 19 C: *Yeah.*

Earlier in the interview, when talking about the anger she felt toward her late husband who was an alcoholic, Margaret mentioned that her “dad never drank,” and “there weren’t too many drinkers” in her family. My initial question in Excerpt 3 refers to those earlier comments, as if suggesting that, despite the absence of “drinkers” in the family, there may have been times when “someone” got angry (ll. 1-3).

In this excerpt, I ask Margaret to think of a time when she was growing up that someone, presumably in her family, was angry. Margaret’s response implies that with nine children in a family it is only natural that there would be some angry moments “I’m sure we had some” (l.6). She uses normalization to construct the anger in her family as well within a normal range, and just what would be expected with so many children (Edwards, 1994; Potter, 1996).

Margaret shifts from talking about the family, more generally, to herself “I’m sure that I had lots of angry moments but...” (l. 6). Again, Margaret uses normalization; her use of the term “I’m sure” suggests that it would be quite natural

for her to have had “lots of angry moments.” Her emphasis on the word moments implies that these episodes or experiences were fleeting. Her use of the word “but” suggests that she cannot recall a specific anger episode. When I interrupt with my next question, pushing her to be more specific, Margaret moves away from talking about her own anger and shifts the focus to her youngest brother.

Her use of the “short fuse” metaphor (l.13) suggested that her brother’s tolerance was low; it did not take much to push him to the limit. In other words, he could “explode” with little or no provocation, he “gets angry over nothin” (l.11). Margaret admits that she most likely “had lots of angry moments” as a child, and yet she effectively contrasts herself with her brother who “gets angry over nothin.” She makes this contrast even more clear in her subsequent remarks about her temperament (ll. 15-17).

I use an extreme case formulation to characterize her brother’s anger in dispositional terms: “(he) *was always like that... as a child?*” (l. 12). This question directs the talk back to Margaret’s childhood. I had asked Margaret to think of a time when she was “growing up” (l. 3) that someone was angry, not what anger looks like today with her adult siblings. When she uses the present tense when talking about her brother’s anger, I ask whether he “*was always like that, as a child?*”

Margaret also speaks in dispositional terms when she very tentatively suggests that she has a “natural something” (l. 15) in her that enables her to curb angry feelings. As if to avoid sounding boastful, Margaret twice uses the modifiers “I think maybe” as she introduces this notion (l. 15). She then uses an extreme case formulation (always) to make a stronger claim: “I always was a happy child” (ll. 17-18). The implied

message here seems to be that anger and happiness are incompatible.

As further evidence of her own happy and calm nature, Margaret includes more family members in her use of contrast. In the following excerpt she compares her younger brothers, whom she remembers “fighting so much” (ll. 4-5), with herself and Eleanor, her sister, with whom she “did just get along fine” (l. 7).

Excerpt 4

- 1 Margaret: As a child I can remember playing with with my brothers and sisters.
2 I'm sure that I got angry sometimes but, I don't remember much about it.
3 Catherine: *Mmhhh. Doesn't stand out in your mind as (pause)*
4 M: I remember my ((clear throat)) my brothers, my younger brothers fighting so
5 much but, Eleanor and I, my sister Eleanor and I were less than two years apart
6 and everybody used to say they never saw two girls get along like we did. We did
7 just get along fine. I can remember, we still do, I can remember how she was left
8 handed and I was right handed, and when we took water to the chickens, we'd say
9 "isn't this wonderful. We can use our, I use my right hand, you use your left one,
10 we can carry a pail together and don't even have to fight" ((said in sing-songy
11 tone))
12 C: *Hah.*
13 M: But I really think that my sister Eleanor and I were a rarity. We never- Mother
14 said she never had to settle a fight with us, never.
15 C: *Yeah.*
16 M: But those younger brothers, oh, there was lots of fights!

Margaret's use of the term "I'm sure" (l. 2) suggests that it is natural to get

angry at times, and she is claiming to be no exception. In this excerpt, she reports “I’m sure that I got angry sometimes but I don’t remember much about it” (l. 2). By admitting that she got angry sometimes, Margaret cannot be accused of trying to present an image of perfection. On the other hand, her claim that she doesn’t remember much about getting angry suggests that this did not happen very often and was not very significant.

Margaret claims that she remembers her younger brothers “fighting so much” (these are the same brothers described earlier in the interview as: “fighting and arguing with each other all the time about something”). Presenting her brothers in this light helps illustrate her point that she and her sister Eleanor were unique. Her claim is supported by the use of extreme case formulations and reported speech: “*everybody* used to say they *never* saw two girls get along like we did” (emphasis added, l. 6). She goes on to explicitly state that she and her sister “were a rarity” (l.13) and supports this claim with more extreme case formulations and reported speech: “Mother said she never had to settle a fight with us, never” (l. 14). She further highlights her point by bringing her brothers in again as a contrast: “But those younger brothers, oh, there was lots of fights!” (l. 16).

In the following excerpt, Margaret’s use of contrast is more subtle. She had just been speaking of her alcoholic husband; and it is in comparison with him that Margaret presents herself as “the calm and collected one in the family” (l. 5).

Excerpt 5

1 Catherine: *And how do you think um (pause) I guess I’m I’m trying to picture*

- 2 *what that looked like in your family even when your when your children were*
3 *were young, what did that anger look like, what did your anger look like?*
4 Margaret: Oh I know that...oh, did that ever make a difference because as you see
5 I was always the calm and collected one in the family.
6 C: *Mmmhmm. Did you feel you had to be?*
7 M: Yeah.
8 C: *Yeah*
9 M: Yes. You see the kids (pause) you know it really hit me, hit home to me one
10 time, I didn't know the kids really were comfortable with the fact that mother
11 doesn't drink? cuz I never drank you know

Margaret's use of the phrase "the calm and collected one in the family" suggests that this was her role, and that every family has someone in this role; someone who can be counted on to be calm and composed. My question suggests that this role did not necessarily reflect Margaret's disposition, but rather was imposed on her by the demands of the situation (l. 6). She agrees that she did feel compelled to fill this role, and goes on to explain that her children found her sobriety a source of comfort (ll. 10-11). The implication in this excerpt is that *someone* had to fill the role of "the calm and collected one in the family," and Margaret's alcoholic husband was not up to the task. This left Margaret with little choice but to fill this role.

4.1.1.1 An exception: Using contrast to present "other" as more calm and composed

Whereas Sarah and Margaret used contrast to indirectly present themselves as calm and composed, Ruth used contrast to present herself as *less* calm and composed than her husband. Ruth was the only interviewee to suggest that her *typical* anger

response involves “blowing up.” By comparison, she presents her husband, in the following excerpt, as frustratingly unflappable (“you can’t make my husband angry” ll. 2-3).

Excerpt 6

- 1 Ruth: Well, I know that I I’ve blown up at my husband, especially my husband,
2 for these little things, and what really bothers me is you can’t make my husband
3 angry and and quite often that’s made me a littler angrier cuz I can’t get him to
4 respond in a way I think it’s natural for a person. Hah. If you’re angry at
5 somebody it’s funny that they don’t, at least I find it odd that they don’t=
6 Catherine: =*Respond in kind*=
7 R: =Respond in kind
8 C: *Yeah. So, you can’t get a rise out of him, even if you want to*
9 R: No! [He (pause) makes fun of me or or uh says something funny or something
10 C: [*Hah*

Throughout the interview, Ruth speaks of her ability to “blow up” and release her feelings of anger quickly. She presents this ability as a mixed blessing; she claims that she feels better after releasing her anger, but her “explosions” have hurt her family members, including her husband. But in Excerpt 6, rather than express remorse over blowing up at her husband for “little things,” she expresses frustration that she cannot get her husband to return her anger.

Unlike Margaret and Sarah, Ruth uses contrast to present the “other” as more calm, cool and collected. However, Ruth’s use of contrast achieves the same result as Margaret’s and Sarah’s use of contrast: an indirect positive evaluation of her own anger

response. Rather than admire her husband's composed manner, Ruth presents it as less "natural" than her own fiery response. And yet, earlier in the interview Ruth insisted that this type of explosive anger was behind her (see Excerpt 21).

4.1.2 Establishing No Harm Done

As earlier noted, women have been socialized to nurture and sustain relationships (Jack, 1999). The direct expression of anger is thought to jeopardize those relationships. In order to downplay the impact of their anger, Margaret and Joan assured me that their relationships with anger targets were unscathed by their direct expressions of anger.

In western cultures, women have been the principal "caretakers" (Miller, 1991). Mothers, in particular, are expected to be patient, solicitous, and selfless. Indeed, most interviewees described their own mothers in these terms. The direct expression of anger or rage is clearly incompatible with this social role (Jack, 1999; Thomas, 1993). I suspected that interviewees would be reluctant to admit feeling or expressing anger with their own children. Both Margaret and Joan report engaging in angry behaviour with their children but they work to establish that their behaviour did not have long-term negative consequences for their children, or for their relationships with them.

In the following excerpt, Margaret seems to become self-conscious after spending some time talking about her late husband. Her suggestion that she "should think about other people" (l. 1) implies that it would be inappropriate to continue talking about her late husband. Her reluctance to continue talking about the anger she felt toward her late husband might reflect social norms against speaking ill of the dead. She does, however, seem to defend or justify her focus on her husband: "but really, when you're married that's, that's the main person that irks you" (l. 1-2). Her use of the pronoun "you"

here suggests that she is not only speaking of her own experience, but married people in general. She uses normalization here to suggest that in *all* marriages, one's spouse is a main source and target of anger. She then broadens this statement to include one's children. She uses the words "of course" here to suggest that it is only natural and inevitable that your children will "irk" you. I take this opportunity to shift the discussion to her children.

Excerpt 7

1 Margaret: But you know I should think about other people I've lived with- but
2 really, when you're married that's, that's the main person that irks you. And your
3 children [of course.

4 Catherine:[*I was going to say, yeah, what about uh your children, how does it*
5 *[play out differently?*

6 M: [Well ((clear throat)) (pause) I think maybe I handled my kids with more like
7 with honey than anger. I never, didn't believe in hitting kids. (pause) I only
8 spanked my son once.

9 C: *Mmmhmm.*

10 M: And he still remembers that.

11 C: *Yeah.*

12 M: It was so stupid, and I says what I shoulda done (tape stopped but I remember
13 her saying she should have spanked the 12 year old who got him into this – Billy
14 was only about 4 or 6 I think)...and he was older than Billy and I had gotten a box
15 of oranges? And they had gotten into those oranges and I think they ate most of
16 them and it was all these peelings there and just- and I thought, what little pigs,

17 they didn't need to eat all of them! And I got so angry and I hi- spanked Billy

18 ((said in hushed voice)). (pause) And he sobbed for half the day. Hah.

19 C: *Hah.*

20 M: So, that was the end of my spankin with him. He and I are still buddies. You

21 know I I just can't stay mad at him.

22 C: *Mmmhmm*

23 M: No.

As she shares this anger episode involving her son, Margaret engages in a number of strategies to present the episode as an exceptional event, an anomaly (Edwards, 1994). She tentatively ("I think maybe") suggests that she handled her children "more like with honey than anger" (ll. 6-7). Here she seems to be borrowing from an old saying "you catch more flies with honey than with vinegar." This proverb suggests that you can more effectively influence others by being sweet rather than being angry or bitter. By suggesting that she *typically* handled her children by using sweetness rather than anger, Margaret sets up her response in the following episode as *atypical*. Before admitting to spanking her son, Margaret makes it clear that this behaviour was not in accordance with her, presumably enduring, "beliefs;" she "didn't believe in hitting kids" (l. 7). She also makes it clear that this behaviour was a rare occurrence by indicating that it "only" happened "once" and that her son, who is now a grown man, still remembers it. Suggesting that this incident stands out in her son's mind supports her claim that this incident was a unique experience for him. My minimal and supportive responses here ("*mmhmm*," "*yeah*") indicate my acceptance of this claim.

Presumably Margaret is referring to her own behaviour when she says "it was

so stupid” (l. 12). This harsh evaluation further sets her response in this episode apart from her more typical responses.

By lowering her voice when she says the words “I spanked Billy” (ll. 17-18), Margaret effectively signals that something important is being said, something that she might feel uncomfortable saying out loud. Her next utterance, on its own, might suggest that this episode was very painful and upsetting for her son “he sobbed for half the day” (l. 18). However, it is immediately followed by Margaret’s laughter, which signals that this was not serious. My own laughter supports her claim that this was a funny rather than upsetting episode.

Margaret’s next statements reiterate that this was a one-time occurrence and provide more evidence that no real harm was done: “He and I are still buddies” (l. 21). Margaret thereby claims that spanking her son did not have long-term negative consequences for their relationship.

Joan also admits engaging in angry behaviour with her children. However, unlike Margaret, Joan does not depict this behaviour as atypical or rare; instead, she suggests it was part of an on-going pattern.

Excerpt 8

- 1 Catherine: *I guess I’m wondering um with other relationships you’ve had in your*
- 2 *life, and even with your children, how have you dealt with (pause) feelings of of*
- 3 *anger or frustration whatever you want to call it?*
- 4 Joan: (pause) Well I know I was, I think I was a shouter when the children were
- 5 little.
- 6 C: *Mmhmm*

7 J: I think I was frustrated because he was always gone because the mother-in-law
8 lived across the farmyard and walked in and out far too often and because I had
9 too many children too soon

After talking about Joan's relationship with her ex-husband, I direct the discussion to "other relationships" and then specifically mention her children as a potential focus. When suggesting we talk about Joan's children, I offer the word "frustration" as a substitute for the word "anger," as if it might be more acceptable to talk about feeling "frustrated" with one's children rather than angry. In other words, I use softer language to try to make Joan feel more comfortable discussing this relatively taboo topic.

Joan's response starts out strong and declarative ("I know I was" l. 4) but then becomes more tentative ("I think I was a shouter" l. 4). Rather than say "I often, or sometimes, shouted at the children" Joan labels herself "a shouter," which suggests this behaviour was part of an on-going pattern. She does, however, limit this behaviour to a time in the past "when the children were little" (ll. 4-5).

Generally, children are considered inappropriate anger targets. As if recognizing this social norm, Joan tentatively ("I think") offers a three-part list of "excuses" for her angry behaviour (ll. 7-9): her husband was "always gone," her mother-in-law was hovering nearby, and Joan had "too many children too soon."

In the following excerpt, Joan works to establish that her anger had no long-term negative consequences for her children. They did not just "survive" her anger, which would be a minimally acceptable outcome, they "survived very very

well actually” (l. 1). As if to avoid sounding boastful about her children, Joan suggests that she is puzzled that they could turn out so well: “I can’t imagine how” (l. 3).

Excerpt 9

- 1 Joan: Uh. And they all survived. Hah very very well actually
- 2 Catherine: *Hah*
- 3 J: I can’t imagine how. Hah. (pause) I do know that yeah, when I was frust-
- 4 whether it was frustration, anger what
- 5 C: *Exhaustion*
- 6 J: that I did I was a a shouter, I wasn’t a beater of children
- 7 C: *Mhmm*
- 8 J: they got smack on the bum sort of thing but no I’ve never
- 9 C: *Yeah*
- 10 J: never (pause) hit or beat. I was I was a yeller mostly
- 11 C: *Yeah*
- 12 J: Which of course is not very effective either but
- 13 C: *Hah*
- 14 J: we all survived it. Hah. And we all end up like (pause) really quite a close
- 15 happy family surprisingly. Hah.

Joan admits that she may indeed have felt anger, rather than just “frustration,” toward her children (ll. 3-4). My offer of the word “*exhaustion*” here suggests that I am sympathetic rather than judgemental (l. 5).

Once again, Joan labels herself as a shouter and yet she downplays the significance of this behaviour by contrasting it with something that clearly would have

been worse; “I wasn’t a beater of children” (l. 6). When compared with beating one’s children, shouting at them seems fairly innocuous.

Her admission that her children “got smack on the bum sort of thing” (l. 8) lends credibility to Joan’s account. She has, by no means, constructed herself as a perfect mother. She has admitted to engaging in behaviours that might be frowned upon by others, including me as the listener. This time she does not offer excuses, but again she makes this behaviour sound fairly innocuous by contrasting it with “hitting or beating” her children. Joan suggests there is a clear distinction between “smack on the bum sort of thing” (l. 8), which is presumably acceptable and relatively harmless, and “hitting or beating” which she has “never never” done (ll. 8-10).

Again Joan seems to negatively evaluate her tendency to yell at her children, claiming it “is not very effective” (l. 12), but then she reiterates that no real harm was done: “we all survived it. Hah” (l. 14). Again she points out that the family went beyond just “surviving” her angry behaviour and ended up “like really quite a close happy family surprisingly” (ll. 14-15). By tacking on the word “surprisingly” at the end of this statement, Joan once again suggests that she is puzzled by how well her family turned out, as if her angry behaviour could just as easily have had long-term negative consequences for her children.

4.2 Distancing Anger

4.2.1 Positioning Anger in the Past

Interviewees worked to establish that anger is insignificant in their lives, and their efforts often involved positioning anger in the past. Interviewees claimed that they no longer had any “reason” to be angry, or that they have outgrown anger. Even

reports of intense anger, which were relatively rare, were positioned in the distant past.

4.2.1.1 No Reason to Be Angry

Interviewees claim that they have no reason to be angry because main sources of aggravation (e.g., ex-husbands, small children) are behind them, and because they now have all that they need. The latter suggests that anger is incompatible with gratitude.

Margaret effectively confines anger to the past by repeatedly claiming that she hasn't been angry "lately." For example, she admits she is quite "enamoured" with the man with whom she is currently involved, and claims: "I wish I could get angry at that Hank guy. Pause. *But you can't eh?* No. He's just awfully nice to me." At one point in the interview, when she is talking about Hank, Margaret spontaneously claims that she hasn't been angry lately: "I really haven't had reasons to be angry much lately. Nobody annoys me. Everything's pretty good." The context of these comments suggest that her relationship with Hank has something to do with Margaret's claim that she has no "reason" to be angry; she has left behind all sources of irritation and aggravation (e.g., her late husband).

Like Margaret, Sarah claims that she has fewer concerns and aggravations at this point in her life. In the following excerpt, Sarah ties the absence of anger to her stage in life.

Excerpt 10

- 1 Catherine: *Um, (pause) now I don't know if this, if this question is one that you'll*
- 2 *be able to answer and again we can, rather than use the word "anger" um, talk*
- 3 *about you know being upset or frustrated um, but some older women would say*

4 *that they actually feel more free uh to express anger than they did when they were*
5 *younger. Uh, others of course, would say the the opposite, that they feel less free*
6 *uh to express those types of feelings. Have you noticed any difference uh in your*
7 *sense of freedom or ability to communicate those kinds of feelings, again, whether*
8 *or not we talk about actual anger but frustration and uh...*
9 Sarah: Mmhmm. I think that things would (pause) things uh frustrated me more
10 when I was younger than they do now. Uh I don't know about expressing it.
11 Maybe I would have been a little quicker to get mad years ago than I am now
12 C: Mmhmm
13 S: But then I think there's more opportunities too, there were more circumstances
14 in which you would react and life goes along pretty smooth here, I don't very
15 often have any reason to (pause)
16 C: *When you say there were more circumstances back then, can you give me some*
17 *examples*
18 S: Well, what I would think is is things would've happened with your kids, they
19 come home from school with a tale that you know somebody's done such and
20 such where you would react to, well, that doesn't happen any more
21 C: Mmhmm. Yeah. They're grown up and they're taking care of themselves.
22 S: They, they are. And the thing is, if if they have a problem they never tell me
23 C: Mmhmm
24 S: Nobody comes to me with some big problems.
25 C: Yeah
26 S: I just hear about the good things.

27 C: *Yeah*

28 S: And I'm sure they have problems too cuz everybody does

29 C: *Sure, yeah.*

30 S: But I just hear about the good times.

In this excerpt, I take great care in setting up my question. As if to make the question seem less threatening, I offer Sarah an “out” by suggesting that she may not be able to answer this question. I also remind her (twice) that we do not have to use the word “anger,” but can use softer alternatives like “upset” and “frustrated.” Earlier in the interview, Sarah made it clear that she was more comfortable admitting feeling upset, frustrated, and even “mad” rather than “angry.”

When asking interviewees about changes in their expression of anger over time, I present them with two options to choose from; one either feels *more* free to express anger or *less* free. My claim that nameless, faceless “older women” have endorsed these options is meant to lend some legitimacy to them.

When asking this question, my language is exceedingly tentative and somewhat muddled. This may have made it difficult for Sarah to know exactly what I was asking her. Her response focuses on *feeling* rather than *expressing* anger, and she avoids any discussion of increased or decreased freedom. Sarah's talk is riddled with modal expressions (e.g., I think) and modifiers (e.g., maybe) which render her statements as somewhat uncertain (Wood & Kroger, 2000). She tentatively suggests that she may have been “a little quicker to get mad years ago” (l. 11). Sarah does not seem convinced of her response, but when I asked about changes to her experience of anger over time, I provided her with only two response options, and “no change” was

not one of them. She strengthens her claim, however, by offering an explanation for the reported change; fewer “opportunities” or “circumstances” in which “you would react” (presumably with anger). She goes on to explain that these “opportunities” no longer arise because her children protect her from upsetting news. Sarah’s talk gives few clues regarding how she feels about being sheltered in this manner; it is not clear whether she feels relieved or isolated as a result.

Sarah lives in a seniors’ apartment and throughout the interview she expresses her appreciation for her living arrangements. She takes this opportunity to highlight how fortunate she is: “life goes along pretty smooth here. I don’t very often have any reason to (get angry)” (ll. 14-15). In the following excerpt, Margaret echoes Sarah’s comments about having no reason to be angry, now that she is settled in a nice seniors’ apartment.

Excerpt 11

- 1 Margaret: So (pause) I’m trying to settle in here.
- 2 Catherine: *Mmhmm*
- 3 M: There’s lots to do. (pause) If you don’t have anything else to do, you can work
- 4 on a jigsaw puzzle, or you can quilt if you want, or you can just do whatever you
- 5 like around here.
- 6 C: *Yeah.*
- 7 M: They have hobby rooms you know.
- 8 C: *Mmm*
- 9 M: Yeah. (pause) It’s a good place to live.
- 10 C: *Oh good.*

11 M: I have no reason to get angry about things any more, I'm pretty well settled.

In describing the seniors' apartment, Margaret highlights her freedom ("you can just do whatever you like around here," ll. 4-5) and the many options available to her ("there's lots to do," l. 3). Margaret's talk in the following excerpt also alludes to freedom: freedom *from* financial concerns, and freedom *to* "hoot around" in her own car (l. 6). She seems to be emphasizing some of the *positive* aspects of this time in her life.

Excerpt 12

1 Margaret: What have I got to be mad about here?

2 Catherine: *After your husband died, you mean?*

3 M: Yeah. Actually, well, you haven't got too many worries now.

4 C: *Mmmhmm.*

5 M: Not really. I mean I've invested my money and it pays for me here. And,

6 what's to do? I have a little car that I hoot around in.

7 C: *Yeah. Hah*

8 M: Got the best of everything.

Like Sarah, Margaret repeatedly expresses gratitude for her current living arrangements: "I'm happy, I got everything I need here. Absolutely everything I need." She claims that she no longer has any reason to be angry because she has all that she needs.

Earlier in the interview, Margaret had identified her late husband, who was an alcoholic, as a main source of her anger. In Excerpt 12, I suggest that she no longer has any reason to be angry because her husband has died. She starts to agree with my

suggestion “yeah” but then catches herself and makes her explanation more broad: “actually well, you haven’t got too many worries now” (l. 3). This shift brings us back to talk about Margaret’s appreciation for all that she has: “got the best of everything” (l. 8).

Margaret is not the only interviewee whose talk links the absence of anger with gratitude. In the following excerpt, Joan dismisses her own anger as inappropriate in light of her good fortune.

Excerpt 13

- 1 Catherine: *Now anger, when you said you dropped anger was that primarily the*
2 *anger you felt towards your ex-husband or*
3 Joan: Probably. And (pause) you know probably one goes around being angry at
4 your lot in life Hah. Uh, you know “why am I never gonna have the holiday in
5 Hawaii?” just like crap but
6 C: *So, you were trying to drop that as well or?*
7 J: Yes. Yeah.
8 C: *Yeah*
9 J: That I, here I you know I’ve I’ve got a great thing going here, I’ve got home,
10 warmth, clothes, family. I have nothing to complain about

Joan’s use of the word “probably” renders her statement more tentative, as if she is offering it up as a hunch or hypothesis rather than a direct claim. Her use of the pronoun “you” suggests that she is not alone in being angry about her “lot in life” (ll. 3-4). And yet, on the heels of normalizing this kind of anger response, her laughter and use of the word “crap” serve to dismiss it as inappropriate and absurd (ll. 4-5).

This dismissal is followed by additional repair work: as a contrast to her self-pitying comment “why am I never gonna have the holiday in Hawaii?” (ll. 4-5), Joan lists those things in her life for which she is grateful, and claims that she has “nothing to complain about” (l. 10).

4.2.1.2 Outgrown Anger

Interviewees claim that they are now less reactive than they were 30 or 40 years ago. They often tie this diminished anger response to their own growth and development; they suggest that the accumulation of life lessons and experiences has given them a new perspective on anger. These claims may reflect social norms and expectations regarding age and wisdom.

In the following excerpt, Sarah tentatively claims that her anger experiences and expressions have been “fairly consistent” but then goes on to suggest a developmental shift. In using the pronoun “you,” Sarah seems to suggest that others experience the same growth and development, becoming more understanding as a result of “more life experiences” (ll. 5-6). Her language remains very tentative (“I think maybe” ll. 4-5) as if she were offering her comments only as a theory.

Excerpt 14

- 1 Catherine: *Um (pause) would you say it's been fairly consistent, your um (pause)*
- 2 *how you feel or how you express anger throughout your life, or has it changed*
- 3 *over the course of (pause)*
- 4 Sarah: I think fairly consistent. I I think as you get older maybe you're a little uh
- 5 (pause) well, I think maybe a little more understanding or you, or you've had
- 6 more life experiences that that – say uh (pause) 30 years ago when I would've

7 been in (small town) if one of my friends would've done something there and the
8 same friend here did the same thing, I don't think it would upset me now like it
9 might have back then. I think I've gotten more tolerant? Or

10 C: *Ok.*

11 S: I think. I I don't know.

12 C: *Yeah. Things don't upset you the same way [as they might have 30 years ago*
13 *or*

14 S: [No. Mm-mmm. No

15 C: *Yeah*

16 S: And if something happens that doesn't please me, I don't go to bed and worry
17 about it you know and not be able to sleep like you'll hear somebody say "oh, I
18 couldn't sleep last night over so and so" well (pause) I would be able to sleep.

19 C: *And 30 years ago do you think you might have lost a little bit more sleep over*
20 *something like that?*

21 S: Yeah. I might have. Yeah, I might've been concerned about that and especially
22 if it would, if it uh, well, I used to get upset about things that would happen to my
23 husband cuz he was very dedicated to his work and I didn't always feel he was
24 appreciated the way he should be and sometimes I used to ((hushed voice)) really
25 get upset with that [employer] and I'd threaten to go and talk to the [employer]
26 hah, which I never did

27 C: *Hah.*

28 S: But uh (pause) it would upset me. Well, of course, if the same thing would've
29 happened now maybe I, you know to another person, maybe I would but, I think

30 maybe I'm more tolerant?

Even when Sarah shifts to making more personal claims (l. 8), her language remains tentative, suggesting that she is not quite convinced of her own statements. She even seems to retract her statements, as if she has gone too far: "I think – I I don't know" (l. 11). Perhaps in an effort to firm up her very cautious response, I paraphrase: "*things don't upset you the same way that they might have 30 years ago.*" Her agreement with this statement seems to bring her back to more solid ground; her response is declarative rather than tentative: "No. Mm-mmm. No" (l. 14).

Again Sarah engages in semantic distancing. Rather than using words like "angry" or even "upset," she offers "if something happens that doesn't please me..." (l. 16). She contrasts herself with others who would dwell on an upsetting event, or lose sleep over it (ll. 16-18).

I seem to be pushing for some evidence of *change* (now versus then) – even "*a little bit*" (l. 19) of change. Sarah tentatively agrees that she "might have" lost sleep or been more concerned about things 30 years ago. Generally Sarah speaks abstractly about anger but here she strengthens her claim by offering a more concrete example (ll. 22-26). She minimizes her anger claim, however, when she laughs, either at her anger or her inaction. Again, she tentatively claims that she is more tolerant (ll. 28-30).

As noted earlier, my question in the following excerpt is framed in such a way that interviewees are encouraged to answer in one of two ways: they either feel *more* free or *less* free to express anger. This question, like so many others in this sequence of interviews, makes both age and gender salient; interviewees are asked to respond *as*

an older woman.

Excerpt 15

- 1 Catherine: *I guess I'm wondering um, some older women would say that they feel*
2 *more free to express anger than they did when they were younger uh now as an*
3 *older woman others of course feel the exact opposite, feel they feel a lot less free*
4 *now to communicate those kinds of feelings. Have you noticed um any differences*
5 *in how you feel about expressing anger now that you are an older woman*
6 Grace: I think I got to the point in my life where I realized that anger (pause)
7 really the person it hurt was me
8 C: *Mhmm*
9 G: Internally and that it never solved anything. And I'm very sorry for the times
10 that I did show anger in situations maybe at school, in the family whatever
11 (pause) I I think anger anger can be used very appropriately in certain situations
12 but I've found that I (pause) there are much better ways of handling things

Like Sarah, Grace alludes to a developmental shift. She claims, albeit tentatively ("I think"), that she has reached a particular "point in her life" and from this new vantage point, she has a new perspective on anger, its harmful effects on her, and its utility ("it never solved anything" l. 9). Again, she positions anger in the past when she expresses regret for "times that (she) did show anger," and suggests that she has since learned "there are much better ways of handling things" (l. 12). The implication seems to be that Grace no longer "shows anger."

Joan also claims that she reached a point in her life when she recognized the self-destructive nature of anger. In the following excerpt, she makes a dramatic claim

about reaching this conclusion. Joan explains that following her divorce she had joined a support group, and one of the topics they discussed as a group was anger.

Excerpt 16

1 Joan: I know anger was one of the topics we looked at and and at that point I
2 simply decided (pause) anger is eating up my stomach, it's eating, it's just eating
3 me up and I'm going to drop it (pause) And I consciously did.

4 Catherine: *And how did you do that do you think?*

5 J: I just decided to, that's all I can, the only way I can describe it

6 C: *You dropped it*

7 J: I I dropped it. Not probably in one day but very soon and I hadn't yet quit
8 drinking but then I did soon after but I remember dropping the anger first

Joan's language in this excerpt is powerfully descriptive. Anger is constructed as a separate entity that is devouring her (ll. 2-3). Its destruction is first limited to her stomach, but then Joan claims that she realized "it's just eating me up" (ll. 2-3). This dramatic presentation suggests that getting rid of anger was a matter of survival for Joan.

At first, Joan constructs anger as a powerful, destructive entity, while she constructs herself as a victim who is being consumed by this anger (ll. 2-3). Then there is an important power-shift in Joan's narrative that has Joan taking control, and deciding to "drop" anger (l. 3). Joan's talk suggests that "dropping" anger did not involve much of an effort or struggle on her part: "I simply decided... I'm going to drop it. And I consciously did" (ll. 1-3). Joan then tempers this bold statement by conceding that the process was a more gradual, and presumably challenging, one than

she might have initially suggested: “I I dropped it. Not probably in one day but...” (l. 7).

Earlier in the interview, Joan had worked to position anger in the past by claiming that anger in her life was “pretty obviously” related to her ex-husband (see Excerpt 17). Her husband is presented as a main source, and/or target, of her anger. Her use of the past tense here (“was”) supports Joan’s earlier claim: “I’m not currently angry...but I was!”

Excerpt 17

1 Catherine: *Um, well I’ll let you sort of direct this you said that [you you do have*
2 *some exp-*

3 Joan: [well, you see

4 anger in my life was pretty obviously uh (pause) to the ex-husband.

5 C: *Ok.*

6 J: Um. (long pause) And and I mean (pause) you don’t want a two-hour harangue
7 about and nor should I too against one person. It didn’t work out. Um (pause) I’ve
8 I’ve also been thinking whether, when did I feel anger and when did I feel hurt?

Joan stops herself from going on a “two-hour harangue,” suggesting that I, the listener, would not want this, and “nor should (she) too against one person” (l. 7). Her use of the word “should” suggests that a two-hour harangue would be inappropriate. Joan quickly shifts away from a blaming stance to more neutral wording, as if no one in particular is to blame for the problems in her marriage: “it didn’t work out” (l. 7). She then switches to general discourse, speaking more abstractly about feelings of anger and hurt. Joan’s suggestion that she *could* go on a two-hour harangue (i.e.,

passionate or intense tirade) about her ex-husband calls into question her claim that her anger is in the past.

4.2.2 Positioning Strong Anger in the Past

Interviewees' reports of intense anger generally came in two forms: the use of metaphorical language, and the expressed desire to kill the anger target. Again, when interviewees shared episodes involving intense anger, they positioned these episodes in the distant past.

4.2.2.1 Use of the metaphor of explosion

Interviewees often substituted milder, less threatening, terms for anger (e.g., annoyed, frustrated) but rarely used *stronger* terms like “infuriated” or “enraged.” Instead, they used metaphorical language to convey strong feelings of anger. Interviewees most often drew on two central anger metaphors: “anger is the heat of a fluid in a container” (Lakoff, 1987, p.383), and “the body is a container for the emotions” (Lakoff, 1987, p.383). As a fluid heats up, it boils, produces steam, and creates pressure on the container. When the pressure on the container becomes too high, the container explodes, and the hot fluid comes spilling out of the container. Similarly, we often speak of intense anger producing pressure inside a person, and when that anger becomes too intense, the person metaphorically explodes. When the person “explodes,” his or her anger is said to come out, or be released (Lakoff, 1987).

Interviewees worked up these explosions as both commonplace and exceptional, as both within and outside their control. They reported feeling “wonderful” after an “explosion,” and yet condemned their behaviour as “stupid” and hurtful.

Earlier in the interview I told Margaret that my stepfather is an alcoholic, and noted: *“it’s interesting to see some of the similar patterns.”* This self-disclosure was meant to establish some common ground between us, and to suggest that I could, therefore, relate to Margaret’s story. In the following excerpt, I refer again to my own family, specifically my mother and her experience of being the peacekeeper in the family. I suggest that my mother’s way of “dealing with it” (i.e., living with an alcoholic) was similar to Margaret’s because *“she felt she had to be the calm one”* (ll. 2-3). This comment refers to Margaret’s earlier claim: “I was always the calm and collected one in the family.” As if to support this claim, Margaret works up her explosive expression of anger as an exceptional event.

Excerpt 18

- 1 Catherine: *Well, I guess I’m just curious too because my, my (pause) mother, the*
2 *way that she dealt with it is to- I think similar, that she felt she had to be the calm*
3 *one*
- 4 Margaret: Yeah=
- 5 C: =*And she had to um, keep the peace.*
- 6 M: Mmmhmm.
- 7 C: *So, I guess I’m curious what she did with her anger. Because she must have*
8 *still had these feelings but just didn’t feel that she could openly express them cuz*
9 *she was supposed to be the peacekeeper.*
- 10 M: Mmmhmm.
- 11 C: *Yeah.*
- 12 M: Yeah well I think you you still you feel like you ought to be the example to the

13 kids too.

14 C: *Mmmhmm*.

15 M: (pause) And you know, the odd time, very seldom that I would get angry

16 about something or the odd time that I'd blow my stack they'd say "oh my gosh!

17 Mom's mad!"

18 C: *This is new. Hah*

19 M: About some silly old thing. Sometimes when you're tired you blow your stack

20 when you shouldn't. ((cleared throat))

By seemingly wondering aloud how my mother handled her anger under these circumstances, I found an indirect, non-threatening way to ask Margaret what *she* "did" with her own anger. Stating that my own mother "*must have still had these feelings*" (ll. 7-8) serves to normalize anger, essentially giving Margaret permission to admit having those feelings also. Finally, in sharing my personal experiences with Margaret, I was counting on the norm of reciprocity.

Margaret's use of the pronoun "you" suggests that she was referring to a shared experience, perhaps between herself, my mother, and other wives of alcoholics: "I think you feel like you ought to be the example to the kids too" (ll. 12-13). The implied message seems to be: you cannot count on your alcoholic husband to be a good example for your children, so this responsibility falls to you.

Her talk then shifts to her own experience. Twice she uses the metaphor of explosion to depict her expression of anger ("blow my stack"). However, she works to establish that this kind of behaviour was rare for her; she would "very seldom" get angry about something or blow her stack "the odd time" (ll. 15-16). She uses reported

speech to bolster this claim, quoting her children's shocked reactions to highlight just how unusual it was for them to see her "blow her stack" (ll. 16-17). My laughter and paraphrasing of her children's reported comments suggest that I accept her claim.

Margaret's next two statements (ll. 19-20) accomplish the following: they minimize her anger, suggesting it was only in reaction to "some silly old thing;" they highlight the situational, rather than dispositional, nature of her anger ("sometimes when you're tired"); and they dismiss her anger as inappropriate ("you blow your stack when you shouldn't").

In contrast, Anne sets up her explosive behaviour as a predictable pattern, and her evaluation of her "explosions" is more complex. Earlier in the interview, Anne had claimed that she was feeling angry "all the time" in her marriage. In the following excerpt, I push her to be more descriptive, asking her "*what did that (anger) look like?*" (l. 2).

Excerpt 19

1 Catherine: *When you say you were angry all the time, can you uh sort of say a*
2 *little bit more about that and what did that look like?*

3 Anne: [Inhale & exhale] (pause) Ok, I think I grew up with the same conditioning
4 as other women my age did that girls are supposed to be good and sweet and kind
5 and anger is just not an acceptable emotion

6 C: *Mmhhh*

7 A: Uh, especially you know expressed overtly

8 C: *Yeah*

9 A: So, what I learned from the psychiatrist that gave me the book is um, I was the

10 kind of woman who would do what they call “stockpiling” anger

11 C: *Mmhmm*

12 A: Um, instead of expressing my anger at the time it occurred, I would just shove

13 it down inside and then once a month um, if I had too much to drink, there was a

14 full moon, and I was menstruating, I would just ex-plode! Um and like all this

15 anger would, well it was like an explosion, all this anger would you know come

16 out and and I’d rant and rave and swear and call my husband names [and

17 C: *[When he*

18 *was there, or when you were alone?*

19 A: Oh no when he was there

Before describing what her anger “looked like,” Anne positions herself within a cohort of women who “grew up with the same conditioning” (l. 3) regarding anger and its expression. Her attempt to contextualize her response in this way also serves to normalize it. The implication seems to be that she, and presumably “women her age,” are products of their environment and “conditioning.”

She does more work to normalize her expression of anger, which she still has yet to describe, when she cites what she learned from a psychiatrist. Anne’s reference to this “expert” lends credibility to her claim that she is “the kind of woman who would do what they call stockpiling anger” (ll. 9-10). Her use of the phrase “the kind of woman” suggests that several other women do this; it is relatively common.

When Anne does finally begin to describe her expression of anger, she contrasts it with what is presumably a preferable anger response: “instead of expressing my anger at the time it occurred, I would just shove it down inside...” (ll.

12-13). And despite having normalized her “stockpiling” of anger, Anne introduces a three-part list of excuses to “explain” her behaviour: “if I had too much to drink, there was a full moon, and I was menstruating, I would just ex-plode” (ll. 13-14). Her use of the word “just” implies that this response was outside of her control; if these three conditions were met, an “explosion” was inevitable. She continues to depict anger as a separate entity outside of her control when she says “all this anger would you know come out” (ll. 15-16). She does not explicitly evaluate her behaviour in this excerpt, but her use of the words “I’d rant and rave” (l. 16) suggests that she was out of control, just making a lot of noise rather than communicating her anger in any effective or meaningful way.

I asked whether these explosions occurred when her husband was present because I was confused by her response. Throughout the interview, Anne constructs herself as a very non-confrontational person who communicates her anger with silence. So, this image of her lashing out at her husband did not fit with what I had heard so far in the interview.

Later in the interview, Anne refers again to her monthly explosions. In the following excerpt, she condemns her behaviour as “stupid” (l. 9).

Excerpt 20

- 1 Anne: when I was upset? [about something. It was as if he didn’t hear a word that
- 2 I said.
- 3 Catherine: [Mmhmm
- 4 A: And so, after a while I would stop trying to communicate.
- 5 C: *Right.*

- 6 A: And I would suppress the anger until the conditions at the end of the month
7 were right and then I would explode.
- 8 C: *Yeah*
- 9 A: And and it was such a a stupid like it wasn't even a way of communicating. It
10 was just ranting and raving and you know and swearing and um
- 11 C: *And how did you feel immediately after one of those [times?*
- 12 A: [Hhho wonderful!
- 13 C: *Oh you did?*
- 14 A: Yes
- 15 C: *So it felt like a release*
- 16 A: Oh did it ever! And so I would be ok for another week or two and then it
17 would start to pile up again
- 18 C: *Mmm, mmhmm*
- 19 A: And another explosion. And that's when Dr. ____ told me that uh that I was
20 stockpiling my anger and that a lot of women do it

In this excerpt, she suggests that she *did* try to communicate with her husband when she was upset, but her efforts were dismissed: "it was as if he didn't hear a word that I said. And so, after a while I would stop trying to communicate" (ll. 1-4). This seems to be offered as an additional explanation for suppressing her anger and then exploding. In Excerpt 19, her use of the words "I'd rant and rave" *implied* a negative evaluation of her behaviour. In this excerpt, the evaluation is much more explicit: "it was such a a stupid – like it wasn't even a way of communicating (l. 9).

After she harshly criticized her explosive behaviour, I was taken aback when

Anne claimed that she felt “wonderful” after her explosions. After engaging in behaviour described as “stupid” (l. 9) one might be expected to feel embarrassed or ashamed, but not wonderful. Despite my obvious surprise (“*oh you did?*”), Anne offers no explanation for this curious response. She does, however, enthusiastically accept the explanation that I offer: “*so it felt like a release*” (l. 15). This account drew on the “explosion” metaphor Anne had used (internal pressure is relieved upon explosion). Again, Anne depicted her anger response as a cyclical pattern that was outside of her control “it would start to pile up again, and another explosion” (ll. 16-19). She once again cited her psychiatrist as a way of legitimizing and normalizing her response pattern: “a lot of women do it” (l. 20).

Like Anne, Ruth’s evaluation of her explosive behaviour is complex. When asked for a second example of a time when she *felt* angry but did not communicate that anger directly to the anger target, Ruth replies that “most of the times” (l. 4) she *does* communicate her anger in a very direct way: she “blows up.” Ruth’s use of the phrase “most of the times” suggests a *pattern* of behaviour. Her use of the present tense here (“I blow up” rather than I *blew* up) also suggests that this is an *on-going* pattern of behaviour. Ruth is the only interviewee who suggests that her *typical* anger response involves “blowing up.”

Excerpt 21

- 1 Catherine: *Ok. Um, well, that was one example actually uh, but I’m wondering if*
- 2 *you can think of another time where you felt angry but you didn’t communicate it*
- 3 *directly to the person that you were angry with*
- 4 Ruth: Most of the times I blow up and people know

5 C: *Ok*

6 R: *Ok?*

7 C: *So that was a fairly rare thing that you would just [hold it in like that*

8 R: [Oh! Very rare! And that's

9 why I think it bothered me cuz when I (pause) blow up and somebody knows

10 about it um, then, I've released it and I'm fine=

11 C: =*Mmhmm*=

12 R: =You know, and like, I could apologize just like as if it were nothing

13 afterwards because hah I'm no longer mad.

14 C: *Hah*

15 R: Hah. I got rid of it you know?

16 C: *Yeah*

17 R: And my, that's that's what I've done with my family which I'm very (pause)

18 ((lowered voice)) you know sorry about uh (pause)

19 C: *So that's more your typical style [is to*

20 R: [Yeah

21 C: *Now, when you say you explode, um, is that after holding it in for a little while*

22 *and then it [comes out or no is it pretty quick?*

23 R: [No No No It just comes out.

24 C: *Ok.*

25 R: *Yeah*

26 C: *Yeah.*

27 R: But not in recent years I've mellowed! My kids, and I told my children, some

28 not all of them, but I told my children that uh you know I was having this thing
29 C: *The interview?*
30 R: Yeah, they said, “sheesh Mom, you should have been doing this 25 years ago
31 you know, you you know, then, you used to” they said “we haven’t seen you
32 angry for a long time” You know?

Ruth suggests that when she “blows up,” she “releases” her anger. This is consistent with the “explosion” metaphor: anger produces pressure inside a person, and when the anger becomes too intense, the person explodes; when the person explodes, her anger comes out (Lakoff, 1987). The sense of relief Ruth reports feeling following an angry “explosion” reflects an additional anger metaphor: anger is a burden (Lakoff, 1987, p.396). Ruth reports feeling “fine” after “blowing up” because “I’m no longer mad – I got rid of it you know?” (ll. 13-15).

Up to this point in the excerpt, it sounds like “releasing” anger in this way (by blowing up) is a good thing: Ruth feels “fine” after doing so. And yet, Ruth reports apologizing for these angry outbursts. Presumably we apologize when we have done something wrong or when we have hurt someone. So, when Ruth says that she apologized for her angry explosions, she calls into question the virtue of these explosions. The apology talk, however, is rather flippant and dismissive, suggesting that her transgression was not very serious: “I could apologize just like as if it were nothing afterwards because hah I’m no longer mad” (ll. 12-13). It is not clear whether the *dummy it* (i.e., use of the pronoun *it* without explicit mention of what *it* refers to in the immediate context: Penelope, 1990) in this utterance is referring to the apology or to the explosion. If “it” refers to the apology, Ruth seems to be suggesting that

apologies were insignificant or easy to make once she had “gotten rid of” her anger [“as if (the apology) were nothing”]. If “it” refers to the explosion, Ruth seems to be suggesting that she could apologize as if the explosion had never happened or was completely insignificant [“as if (the explosion) were nothing”]. Her laughter conveys that the explosions and the subsequent apologies were no big deal; it was all quite funny or silly really. My laughter provides her with consensus information: I agree that it is funny and not to be taken too seriously. Her talk seems to take a more serious turn when she admits “that’s what I’ve done with my family which I’m very you know sorry about” (ll. 17-18). Again, initially Ruth’s talk suggests that her “explosions” are positive; they give her a chance to “release” her anger so that she can feel “fine” again. However, she ends up apologizing for those explosions, and here she expresses remorse over engaging in this type of anger behaviour with her family.

I bring her back to establishing these explosions as a pattern of behaviour. My use of the term “typical style” suggests that people have a preferred approach or a characteristic way of responding to anger. Ruth agrees with my assessment that “*that’s more your typical style*” (l. 19) and does not seem to object to my use of these dispositional terms. As I am asking her to clarify the conditions under which she “explodes” I switch from describing Ruth as an agent to describing her as a patient. I ask if she explodes “*after holding it in for a little while*” (l. 21) which suggests that Ruth has control over her anger and is able to “hold it in” for a while before choosing to release it. I then ask if Ruth explodes “*after holding it in for a little while and then it comes out* – or no is it pretty quick?” The latter question suggests that the anger “comes out” as if by its own free will. This talk suggests that anger is “a separable

entity (that) can overcome someone” (Lakoff, 1987, p.399). Ruth’s response suggests that she accepts this construction of anger. She adds the word “just:” “no. it just comes out” (l. 23), suggesting that it is out of her control, it just happens. The implication is that Ruth’s anger explosions are involuntary.

Throughout this excerpt, and elsewhere in the interview, Ruth speaks of “blowing up” as her typical anger response. And when she speaks of blowing up being her typical response, she uses the present tense: “most of the times I blow up and people know” (vs. I blew up, and people knew); “cuz when I blow up and somebody knows about it;” “*So that’s more your typical style is to* – Yeah;” “It just comes out.” In Excerpt 21, she abruptly switches to temporal distancing (l. 27), suggesting that all of this explosive anger is behind her; she doesn’t “blow up” any more. As if recognizing this claim might be questioned, in light of the recent anger episodes she has cited throughout the interview, Ruth quotes her children as a means of building consensus (ll. 27-32); others agree that her anger is in the past. And her children should certainly be considered credible sources; they should know. Her use of the word “mellowed” (l. 27) may reflect the cultural expectation that older adults are less emotional; they “mellow with age.”

Generally “explosive” anger is frowned upon, and when interviewees claim this behaviour as their own, they open themselves up to negative evaluations from the listener. By firmly placing their explosive behaviour in the past, however, Margaret, Anne and Ruth make it safe to discuss this behaviour. It is acceptable to talk about our past transgressions if we have learned from them or have been reformed somehow since then.

4.2.2.2 Claiming murderous thoughts

Some interviewees told me about intense feelings of anger that were accompanied by thoughts of killing their anger target. These reports were immediately followed by laughter or by an abrupt change of topic.

In the following excerpt, Margaret works to normalize anger by referring to what she learned at Al-Anon: “nothing wrong with being mad” (l. 3). In this excerpt, the anger target is her late husband who was an alcoholic.

Excerpt 22

- 1 Margaret: You’ll have to mention that, that Al-Anon helped me a lot about how to
2 deal with anger? You know I also learned at Al-Anon that anger is good. Nothing
3 matter- nothing wrong with being mad
4 Catherine: *Yeah.*
5 M: Anger’s alright.
6 C: *Yeah. Did they teach you what to do with that [anger?*
7 M: [As long as you- Yes. Just don’t
8 throw things. Hah
9 C: *Hah*
10 M: ((cough)) Hah. (inaudible). Can’t kill him you know. Hah.
11 C: *Hah.*

Margaret points out that she and I are not engaged in a “normal” conversation when she insists “you’ll have to mention that” (l. 1). This comment highlights her awareness that this interaction is not just between herself and me. Recognizing that her comments will be shared with a wider audience, Margaret takes this opportunity to

praise Al-Anon.

Her comment “you’ll have to mention that” also sets up her next statement as an important one. She begins to state that Al-Anon teaches people that “anger is good” (l. 2), but as if recognizing that this might be over-stating the case, she modifies this to “nothing wrong with being mad, anger’s alright” (ll. 3-5).

My next question suggests that you must *do* something with anger (l. 6), that it must be handled or managed somehow. In response, Margaret offers examples of what *not* to do with your anger: “just don’t throw things. Hah...Can’t kill him you know. Hah” (ll. 7-10). Her laughter following these examples indicates that these options were never seriously considered. My laughter (ll. 9-11) conveys that I received her comments as they were intended (i.e., as a joke). Perhaps my non-judgemental response made it safe for Margaret to make a similar “joke” later in the interview: “And I think maybe prayer did help a lot for me. *Mmmhmm*. *In what way?* Please God, don’t let me blow his head off Hah.”

Rather than claim that she had thoughts of killing her anger target, in the following excerpt, Ellen reported that she wished her target would die. When asked to think of *a* time when she was angry as a child (i.e., a specific anger episode), Ellen responded with more general statements. She tentatively (“I think”) suggested that she was angry with her mother a lot (l. 4). Her use of the term “a lot” suggests that her anger was pervasive. She also offers an “explanation” for the anger she felt toward her mother: “because she was angry with us - with me” (ll. 4-5). As she corrects herself here, she establishes that *she* was the main target of her mother’s anger.

Excerpt 23

- 1 Catherine: *I guess I'm going to really back track you to when you were uh when*
2 *you were growing up, what did (pause) can you think of a time when you were*
3 *angry when you were growing up*
- 4 Ellen: Um. (long pause) I think I was angry with my mother a lot because she was
5 angry with us, with me. I had to do things right, I was the eldest
- 6 C: *Mmhmm*
- 7 E: Um but I didn't express it directly (pause) So I remember hop- wishing at one
8 point she'd die. So that was one piece I remember
- 9 C: *Mmhmm*
- 10 E: I remember, um (pause) I don't remember getting angry that many times, I
11 remember hitting a friend over the head with a book (pause) cuz she um (long
12 pause) it was just a class room situation where I stood up and she took my seat
13 and wouldn't move so it was like "I'll show you"
- 14 C: *Hah*

Presumably Ellen is referring to anger when she says "I didn't express it directly" (l. 7). Instead, she remembers wishing her mother would die. This strong anger claim is qualified by the words "at one point" (ll. 7-8). Ellen wished this "at one point;" it was not a recurring wish or desire. Following this somewhat surprising revelation, Ellen shifts away from talk about her mother, and perhaps engages in some repair work when she claims "I don't remember getting angry that many times" (l. 10). She moves on to a more innocuous anger episode involving "just a class room situation" (ll. 10-12).

Ruth makes the strongest claim regarding having murderous thoughts. In the

following excerpt, she engages in pre-emptive self-condemnation when she refers to herself as a “petty person” (l. 1). Because this is the second time she has described herself as “petty,” I ask Ruth to explain what she means by that. She admonishes herself for not looking at the whole picture and focusing on the positive aspects of the “wonderful team” with whom she worked (ll. 3-6). After outlining what she “should” have done differently, Ruth switches back to the anger episode she had earlier described involving her co-worker Helene. In a brainstorming session facilitated by Helene, Ruth offered a solution to the problem they were discussing, and Helene reportedly dismissed her comment by saying “Ruth, you are so naïve, we’ll disregard what you’ve just said.”

Excerpt 24

- 1 Ruth: I’m very petty person you see
- 2 Catherine: *What do you mean by that? when you say that?*
- 3 R: Well I should’ve been able to look beyond one person’s foibles or one person’s
- 4 (pause) you know and look at the entire- like I think (pause) we had between 60
- 5 and 65 staff and they were fabulous people, worked together just like a (pause)
- 6 wonderful team. It was really, I still look upon it (pause) with amazement
- 7 C: *Mmhmm*
- 8 R: That we worked so well together but when Helene came in it just somehow
- 9 (pause) tipped the apple cart a bit
- 10 C: *Yeah*
- 11 R: And and and I think a bit of resentment? on my part (pause) but I should have
- 12 looked at the whole picture, not this one per- Hah. But when she says “so naïve”

- 13 ohh!
- 14 C: *Hah.*
- 15 R: I could've I could've killed her!
- 16 C: *Yeah*
- 17 R: I think if I'd have had a six gun I woulda you know, just shot her! Hah.
- 18 C: *Hah. So now, did you ever even in your mind consider (pause) going and*
- 19 *talking to her=*
- 20 R: =Never=
- 21 C: =*about what she had said? No.*
- 22 R: No. Last thing on my mind. I could do that with anybody else

Ruth emphasizes how angry she was by stating that she “could’ve killed her” (l. 15). As if to strengthen her anger claim, she repeats this sentiment and even provides information about *how* she would have killed her: “I think if I’d have had a six gun I woulda you know, just shot her!” (l. 17). My laughter (l. 18) following this statement indicates that I do not take it seriously; it suggests that Ruth’s statement was a joke or at least an exaggeration. My response also serves to defuse the situation. I quickly move the talk away from Ruth’s intense anger. What I find most interesting about this exchange is my reaction to Ruth’s strong anger claim. Throughout all of the interviews I pushed interviewees to discuss anger episodes and yet, when Ruth expressed strong anger, rather than explore this anger, I made a hasty retreat, changed the subject, and engaged in “smoothing over” behaviour.

4.2.3 An Exception: Positioning Anger in the Present

Though some of their assertions were more convincing than others, most

interviewees claimed that anger was behind them. However, Ellen makes no attempt to position anger in the past; nor does she claim that her anger has diminished over time. To the contrary, in the following excerpt, Ellen insists that she feels all feelings very strongly, including anger.

Excerpt 25

- 1 Ellen: But if it feels like it was a family member, somebody in my inner circle
2 then I still have to watch for the hurt reaction
3 Catherine: *Mmhmm*
4 E: If I don't get into that if I can see it, if I can have my feelings of anger in
5 response then it's much healthier
6 C: *Mmmhmm. But typically, your first reaction is hurt still. (pause) Do you think?*
7 E: With somebody who is very close
8 C: *Yeah, a family member*
9 E: Uh, hmmm, I'm not sure, I think it's it's more or less I I think that's changed a
10 lot too over time, I think now when I'm angry, I used to wake up at 4 in the
11 morning and think "boy I'm angry!" hah about something and now I I feel it more
12 or less straight away
13 C: *Yeah, you're more aware of it in the moment [that this is anger*
14 E: [Yes. Yes
15 C: *Yeah. Ok.*
16 E: And usually can can choose an appropriate response at least not aggressive
17 response

- 18 C: *Mmhmm*
- 19 E: But um, at the moment which is is quite good
- 20 C: *So you find you're actually able to, in the moment, you know see your options*
- 21 *in terms of how you respond rather than [snapped fingers] being uh fairly*
- 22 *reactive or?*
- 23 E: I've still, I feel very angry but I I think I'm I think at the same time as well
- 24 C: *Yeah yeah yeah*
- 25 E: I think I feel my feelings very strongly you know I mean I don't know uh on a
- 26 scale of one to ten what that is
- 27 C: *Yeah*
- 28 E: ...but uh I I think I feel all feelings very strongly

Ellen's reference to "the hurt reaction" (l. 2) relates to earlier claims that her anger was mixed with hurt and often communicated through tears, with her mother and her ex-husbands: "I think, well that was how I would handle, actually that was how I, my anger came out – it was more like it was hurt and I would cry." In the current excerpt, she suggests that she must be vigilant and guard against this "hurt reaction" (ll. 1-2). Ellen uses evaluative language to stress her preferred approach "if I can have my feelings of anger in response, then it's much healthier" (ll. 4-5).

Much like the other interviewees, Ellen reports that her response to anger has changed over time. She claims that she now has greater control over her response to anger, and is able to "choose an appropriate response" (l. 16). She also congratulates herself for being able to respond "at the moment" (l. 19) rather than having a delayed reaction. Early in this excerpt, the focus of Ellen's talk is anger, but her final statement

is more general, encompassing “all feelings” (l. 28). This shift serves to downplay anger per se, and suggests that it is just one of many emotions that she feels “very strongly.”

4.3 Constructing Anger as Forgotten

Sarah used minimizing *and* distancing strategies to construct anger as forgotten. She repeatedly claims that she cannot recall any anger episodes and, at times, she explicitly suggests that any anger or irritation she may have felt was so far in the past and so insignificant that she has simply forgotten it.

Before we had even begun the formal interview, Sarah claimed that she could not recall any anger episodes (see Excerpt 26 below). As if trying to manage my expectations from the outset, she reminds me that she told me this before, when we spoke on the telephone: “like I told you in the first place, I can’t remember times of being really angry” (ll. 4-5). She goes on to clarify what she means by “really angry,” distinguishing it from “times of being frustrated or upset” which, she concedes, she *can* recall.

Excerpt 26

- 1 Catherine: *Now before we actually begin, do you have any questions for me about*
2 *the study?*
- 3 Sarah: No I don’t. I don’t know if I’m real clear you know about it, study. As I
4 think about this, like I told you in the first place, I can’t remember times of being
5 really angry, maybe I don’t understand anger, I can think of times of being
6 frustrated or upset but I haven’t uh (pause) felt real anger where I felt I was gonna
7 hit or do something.

- 8 C: *Ok, well, we'll definitely talk about sort of what are those distinctions [then for*
9 *you*
- 10 S: [mhmm
- 11 C: *and when are times, we'll sort of flesh out some times when you have felt*
12 *annoyed or frustrated. Before that, though, I'd like to actually just go through just*
13 *some background information if that's ok? "Sarah", where were you born?*

Sarah uses the contrastive conjunctive marker “but” (l. 6) to distinguish what she has just said from what is to follow, and to make it clear that “being frustrated or upset” is quite different than feeling “real anger where I felt I was gonna hit or do something” (ll.6-7). Her talk suggests that “real anger” involves acting out in some way, possibly even violently.

As if to reassure Sarah that her contribution would be a useful and meaningful one, I assure her that her semantic distinctions are worth discussing, and that we can focus on times when she has felt annoyed or frustrated rather than “angry.” I was true to my word, and throughout the interview I worked to avoid the word “anger;” I followed Sarah’s lead, using softer, presumably more palatable, words like “upset” and “annoyed.” I engaged in this kind of semantic distancing in the following excerpt (ll. 4-5).

Excerpt 27

- 1 Catherine: *Ok. So, Sarah when we talked on the phone you said that you haven't*
2 *um had a lot of what you'd consider anger experiences, and just now you*
3 *mentioned that, well, maybe some frustration, maybe annoyance uh, so maybe we*
4 *can talk a little bit about a time recently when you felt either frustrated or uh*

5 *annoyed, if you can think of one of those times and tell me about that.*

6 Sarah: I can't really think of of anything. Hah. You know there's little frustrations

7 come up when you live with a lot of old people you know.

8 C: *Hah.*

9 S: But nothing ever serious. And I think that the fun times so much outshadow

10 them you forget the other times?

11 C: *Mhmm*

12 S: But I can't think of anything, you mean within the last year or something?

13 C: *Uh, within the last couple years yeah I guess so.*

14 S: Yeah, I can't think of anything.

15 C: *Pause. Can you think of a time when you uh found yourself in a conflict uh*

16 *situation or a disagreement with someone?*

17 S: Uh (pause) no not not really.

18 *Mm-mmm*

19 S: We're pretty agreeable here.

20 C: *Yeah.*

21 S: No, no I can't think of being in, really in conflict with anybody.

22 C: *Ok. When we talked on the phone you said that you would like to talk about*

23 *anger, maybe not about anger experiences, but you said you did give it some*

24 *thought, and maybe had some ideas about why you might not feel a lot of anger.*

Repeatedly, Sarah claims that she "can't think" of a single episode in which she felt annoyed or frustrated. She concedes that "little frustrations come up when you live with a lot of old people" (ll. 6-7), but her use of the adjective "little" conveys that

these frustrations are minor and insignificant, and her laughter suggests that she considers these incidents more amusing than annoying. She further minimizes these “little frustrations” by claiming that they were never serious, they were “outshadow(ed)” by the fun times and, therefore, were forgotten.

I persist in asking Sarah to identify and discuss anger episodes, despite her assertions that she cannot recall any such episodes. I find a different way of asking the same question: “*Can you think of a time when you uh found yourself in a conflict uh situation or disagreement with someone?*” (ll. 15-16). Sarah is equally persistent; again, she claims that she cannot think of any such episodes. As an explanation, she offers “we’re pretty agreeable here” (l. 19). The implication seems to be that people who are “agreeable” do not have disagreements or engage in conflict.

I finally gave up on pushing her to think of an anger episode, and instead reminded her of our earlier conversation when she had said she *wanted* to talk about anger (ll. 22-24). This was my gentle way of reminding her of her *obligation* to discuss anger. If she could not think of specific anger experiences, I invited her to talk about her *absence* of angry feelings and experiences.

In the following excerpt, Sarah explains the absence of anger and conflict in her marriage. She makes an explicit link between memory and the significance of any anger episodes involving her late husband.

Excerpt 28

1 Sarah: Our backgrounds were were kind of similar (pause) that uh (pause) I I

2 guess the thing is our expectations were kind of the same you know [we

3 Catherine: [Mmhmmm

- 4 S: We didn't uh (pause) want or or uh try to achieve something kind of out of our
 5 reach? That=
 6 C: =*Mmhmm*=
 7 S: =Like financially we never went into debt over something or had arguments
 8 over money or things like that
 9 C: *Right*
 10 S: This is just kind of the way it was. But I think it was our backgrounds for both
 11 of us maybe that (pause)
 12 C: *That there wasn't a lot of anger [expressed in in the home*
 13 S: [No! No. I never remember any anger or
 14 anything that- like I say, I I guess there were some disagreements but if they're
 15 minor you forget them.
 16 C: *Mmhmm. Yeah.*
 17 S: And and the good times, it's just like here, the good times uh far over- over-
 18 ride the the bad times so (pause) I don't remember them I guess
 19 C: *Mmhmm. So, it's certainly not a prominent theme [for you*
 20 S: [No. No

My suggestion that “*there wasn't a lot of anger expressed in the home*” (l. 12) leaves room for the possibility that there was *some* anger expressed in the home. As if rejecting this version of events, Sarah uses an extreme case formulation (“never”) to make a much stronger claim: “I never remember any anger or anything that-” (ll. 13-14). She stops herself mid-sentence, as if realizing that the claim she is making (i.e., that there was *never* any anger in her marriage) is neither realistic nor credible. She

tentatively (“I guess”) admits that “there were some disagreements” but quickly dismisses them, claiming that they were so minor and insignificant that they have been forgotten (ll. 14-15). She goes on to add that they have been forgotten because the good times over-ride the bad times.

4.4 Understanding Anger-Talk in Context

As earlier noted, talk is embedded in a particular sequence of interaction (e.g., question and answer) and a particular context (e.g., research interview), and can only be understood within that context. The research interview represents a unique type of interaction involving a unique set of expectations and roles. This unique context will be explored in terms of its potential influence on interviewees’ talk, as well as my own.

4.4.1 The Interview as a Unique Interaction

The research interview is unlike any “normal” conversation. The interviewer and interviewee are typically strangers, and yet they have come together to talk about personal life experiences. It is clear to both interactants, however, that the sharing of personal experiences will be one-sided. So, unlike a “normal” conversation, there is no expectation that self-disclosure will be mutual. Generally the interviewer and interviewee accept their distinct roles. The interviewer guides, or controls, the interaction to a great extent, both directly (with the questions she asks), and indirectly (by rewarding or showing greater interest in certain types of responses). The interviewer asks questions and the interviewee is expected to answer those questions.

Interviewees in the current study were told that their responses would be analysed, shared with others, and possibly written up for publication. They may,

therefore, have felt some pressure to ensure their responses were thoughtful, interesting, coherent, and relevant to the research topic. And, despite my assurances that I was not a *clinical* psychology graduate student, interviewees may have been particularly concerned about their responses being “analysed” by a psychologist.

Interviewees’ talk revealed their awareness of the unique nature of our interaction. Margaret brings attention to the fact that her responses will be shared with others when she provides me with these instructions: “You’ll have to mention that, that Al-Anon helped me a lot about how to deal with anger?” (Excerpt 22). Joan claims that her story was “worth hearing” because her experience was shared by “a lot of women:” “I know now one of the reasons I thought this might be worth hearing because I think I’m not alone, I dealt with anger by drinking. And the more I hear and listen and keep my ears open, I think there was a lot of women sat at home alone and drank.”

4.4.2 Interviewees Distanced Themselves from the Research Topic

Because interviewees in the current investigation had volunteered to participate in a study about older women’s anger experiences, I assumed that these women had a particular interest in talking about anger, and that they had specific anger experiences that they were willing to share. Early in the data collection process, I found myself questioning these assumptions.

In order to gauge interviewees’ interest in my research topic, and to explore their motives for agreeing to participate, I asked interviewees if they found the topic particularly interesting. My intention in asking this question was to determine whether an interview would be potentially “fruitful”; did it seem the interviewee had

something to say about anger, or was she just trying to be generous and helpful?

While this was meant to serve as a “screening” question of sorts, interviewees’ responses to this question were interesting in their own right. Interviewees took this opportunity to distance themselves from the topic of anger, as if to say “just because I was willing to talk to you about anger does not mean I am an angry woman.” Only two interviewees suggested the research topic had some personal relevance for them, and both suggested that their anger was restricted to one particular point in time. Grace suggested that she chose to participate “because I’ve been going through an extremely frustrating, hurtful, angry um, period.” Her use of the word “period” suggests that her anger is temporary and limited to this point in time. Anne claimed that her interest in the study related to her past experiences with depression, and her understanding that “a lot of depression is caused by anger directed towards the self.” Anne positions her depression, and presumably any related anger, in the past (“years ago when I was married”).

Other interviewees suggested that they volunteered for the study because they wanted to be helpful, to contribute to research. Ellen reported “I did one other study before... and I quite enjoyed participating in research.” Joan reported giving it a lot of thought before deciding that she might have something to contribute: “I found it such an interesting topic. See then I literally thought about it for 10 days. First of all thinking I don’t have anything to contribute because I’m not currently angry. And then I got thinking – but I was! And just thought, well if there’s anything to contribute why not?” Like Anne, Joan takes this opportunity, early in the interview, to position anger in the past: “I’m not currently angry... but I was!”

In the following excerpt, Ruth downplays her interest in the topic of anger. She claims that my question about her interest in the study is a “dumb question” (l. 4) and repeats three times that her decision to participate had “nothing to do with anger.” She claims that the only reason she is participating is to help out a graduate student.

Excerpt 29

- 1 Catherine: *Ok, well, before we get started I wanted to ask you uh, what was it*
2 *about this study that interested you or made you want to participate do you*
3 *think?=-*
4 Ruth: =Oh, that’s a, that’s a dumb question really – you should never ask that
5 kind of question.
6 C: *Hah*
7 R: It’s nothing to do with anger, nothing whatsoever to do with anger.
8 C: *That’s not what sort of drew you?*
9 R: It’s just that- I I went, I got a couple of degrees and I was working on, I was
10 thinking of working on my masters at one time...
11 ...
12 R: ...And so anyone who’s working on their masters or PhD or anything, I really
13 think if there’s a possibility that somebody in the general public can offer any
14 kind of support, I think (pause) it, you know, we we really should offer it.
15 Because some day it could be my turn in some other way.
16 C: *Yeah, yeah.*
17 R: So, it has really nothing to do with anger, actually
18 C: *Ok, so it wasn’t the topic [*

19 R: *[The whole idea of anger kind of you know threw me*

In the following excerpt, Sarah also claims that her motivation for participating in the study is to “help” me; she reports that she feels a responsibility to help students, and believes that participating will be “fun” (ll. 4-12). This is not, of course, what I had hoped to hear. I probe further, asking if she finds this particular topic interesting. She claims that she has no special interest in the topic (l. 15). As a motive for participating, I reiterate what she has just said, and offer: “*you wanted to help*” (l. 18). When she agreed with this explanation, my heart sank and I considered aborting the interview. However, two thoughts kept me from doing so: (1) it would seem rude, and (2) in our telephone conversation she said she had some thoughts about why she does *not* experience a lot of anger, and that sounded potentially promising.

Excerpt 30

1 Catherine: *Now before we actually get started on the interview um, just like to ask*
2 *you what it was about this study that interested you, or sort of made you want to*
3 *participate?*

4 Sarah: Well mostly, um, I feel that you people that are doing these things, if I can
5 be of any help, ok. And I think, if I learn anything, well, I’ve learned something
6 you know? I, but I really am interested in in helping the students, just as we have
7 the students come here you know, if we can be of help, it’s the activity committee
8 that looks after that too.

9 C: *Mmhmmm*

10 S: And I feel if we can be of help to these young people, well, I feel it’s our
11 responsibility too. And, and besides it’s fun you know, we get more out of it than

- 12 they do maybe.
- 13 C: *Hah. I don't know. Uh, was there anything about, with this particular topic or*
- 14 *area that you felt would be interesting to, to talk about, or participate?*
- 15 S: Not really.
- 16 C: *No?*
- 17 S: No.
- 18 C: *Just that you wanted to help, participate?*
- 19 S: Mmhmmm
- 20 C: *Ok. So, "Sarah" when we talked on the phone you said that you haven't um*
- 21 *had a lot of what you'd consider anger experiences, and just now you mentioned*
- 22 *that, well, maybe some frustration, maybe annoyance uh, so maybe we can talk a*
- 23 *little bit about a time recently when you felt either frustrated or uh annoyed, if you*
- 24 *can think of one of those times and tell me about that.*

Sarah's response to this question is captured in Excerpt 27. Repeatedly, she claims that she cannot think of a single episode in which she felt annoyed or frustrated, or even when she "*found (herself) in a conflict uh situation or a disagreement with someone.*" Though we were only a couple of minutes into the interview, I was beginning to feel quite discouraged and frustrated; this woman was violating my assumption that interviewees would come to the interview ready to talk about anger! I pushed her several times to think of an anger episode but when it became clear that strategy was not working, I appealed to her sense of responsibility and her expressed desire to "help" me; I reminded her of our earlier conversation when she had *said* she wanted to talk about anger (see Excerpt 27). This was my

gentle way of reminding her of her *obligation* to discuss anger.

4.4.3 My Attempts to Control the Interview

I began most of the interviews with a similar opening statement and question: “*As you know, I am interested in learning about older women’s experiences of anger. So, can you think of any times recently when you felt angry?*” The opening statement accomplishes a number of things. It reminds the interviewee of the focus of the research, and therefore, the intended focus of our conversation. The phrase “as you know” acknowledges that the interviewee is already well aware of the focus of the research. It also serves as a subtle reminder of my expectation and the interviewee’s obligation; she knows that I have invited her to talk about her anger experiences, and in accepting that invitation, she has agreed to share her accounts of some of those experiences. The opening statement suggests that the interviewee should be prepared for my opening question; this question (and subsequent questions about her anger experiences) should not seem odd or unexpected, given the focus of the research. Finally, the opening statement reveals those categorizations that are most salient to me as a researcher; I remind the interviewee that I am interested in learning about her experiences because she is a woman and because she is older.

Rather than ask interviewees to think about and share *any* of their anger experiences, my initial question asks them to present a *recent* episode. I deliberately chose to be somewhat directive with this first question so that I could hear about interviewees’ anger experiences as older women (i.e., rather than only as young girls or women). The potential cost of being directive at this point is that I have limited the interviewee’s choice, and I have started out the interview talking about a recent anger

episode rather than one that is particularly memorable or significant to the interviewee herself. I have also communicated that I am in control; I will determine what kind of anger experiences she shares with me.

Evidence of my “control” over the interview process is pervasive. I wanted to ensure that each interview transcript would be full of relevant and analysable data, so I worked very hard to keep interviewees “on topic.” As I read through the completed transcripts, I could see just how relentless I had been in my pursuit of “anger-talk”; I pushed interviewees to identify and discuss anger episodes, resisted their efforts to move away from anger-talk, and repeatedly brought them back to potentially “contentious” topics. For example, when it became clear that talk of Joan’s siblings was not going to glean any significant anger episodes (“we were just always on good terms”), I directed the conversation back to her marriage because she had already indicated that her ex-husband was a main source of anger for her. I presumed, therefore, that this might be a more fruitful topic.

As I conducted the interviews, I had a clear idea of what a “good” or “successful” interview would look like: it would be full of detailed stories about specific anger episodes. Throughout the interviews I pressed interviewees to generate these kinds of accounts (e.g., “*can you think of a time when you were growing up, a time when someone was angry*” Excerpt 3). I was often disappointed with their responses, as they did not fit within my framework of a “good” interview. Rather than describe specific anger episodes in full fleshy detail, interviewees often spoke about hypothetical responses to hypothetical anger episodes (e.g., “if the same thing happened to me, I might be what I would call upset” Excerpt 1); or about their own or

others' dispositional approaches to anger: "I never did have a quick temper" (Excerpt 2); "my youngest brother's just like a fuse" (Excerpt 3); "I was always the calm and collected one in the family" (Excerpt 5). They also spoke more generally about lessons they had learned about anger: "I guess I've learned that... if you get really upset and mad yourself and have it inside, you're just hurting yourself" (Excerpt 2). In retrospect, I find all of this discourse very interesting but at the time (i.e., when I was conducting the interviews), I believed these kinds of responses were "un-useable" and I found myself thinking: "how can I get this interviewee back on track?" It is quite possible that interviewees recognized which of their responses I considered interesting or "fruitful" (i.e., stories about specific anger episodes) and which I considered irrelevant or "off-topic."

Interviewees may also have picked up on my assumption that people should communicate their anger in a direct and open manner. Throughout my graduate studies, my primary research and applied interests have been in the area of conflict. I have facilitated workshops in conflict management and participated in conflict interventions. As a trainer and facilitator I have emphasized the importance of constructive and open communication among conflict partners. This message is in contrast to the lesson I learned growing up, that keeping the peace is more important than telling others what I want or need. Though I still struggle with these contradictory messages when I find myself in conflict, I have come to value open communication and hold it up as an ideal. This bias is evident throughout the interviews as I repeatedly ask interviewees if they confronted their anger targets. On three different occasions, I asked this question even after interviewees had already established that

they did *not* confront. In these instances, the question does not seem to be seeking *clarification* of the response (it is clear their response was non-confrontational); instead it seems to be pulling for an *explanation* of the response.

I was most relentless in my pursuit of anger-talk during Sarah's interview. Throughout the interview I pushed Sarah to identify specific anger episodes, and to think of situations in which she might conceivably confront someone. As I read over the interview transcript, I wondered whether she sensed my desperation in the interview or felt some pressure to be a "better" or "more helpful" interviewee. After discussing a number of situations in which she *would not* likely confront someone, and perhaps sensing my frustration or disappointment, Sarah finally suggested a situation in which she *might* confront. In the following excerpt, it seems as if Sarah is trying to give me what I have been looking for, but then does some back-peddaling as if she has caught herself making claims that are just not accurate.

Excerpt 31

- 1 Catherine: *Yeah. So, you wouldn't be likely to actually confront a doctor, for*
- 2 *example, if he was...*
- 3 Sarah: No. No. I I wouldn't likely confront the person
- 4 C: *Mmhmm. Yeah*
- 5 S: I, I'm more liable to confront the person on behalf of somebody else – if
- 6 somebody here (in seniors' apartment) did something really unkind to someone
- 7 here, I might confront that person, I don't know? I really don't know if I would or
- 8 not.
- 9 C: *Or if it were, someone was doing something that was upsetting your child you*

- 10 *might uh, be more likely to confront them on their behalf rather than on your own*
11 *behalf.*
- 12 S: That's right. Yeah
- 13 S: *Yeah.*
- 14 C: I I might do that.

Her language is very tentative, as if she feels she has gone too far, and is trying to take back what she has just said: "I might confront... I don't know? I really don't know if I would or not" (ll. 7-8). I am not ready to let her off the hook, however. If she has tossed me a bone here, I certainly lunge at it, trying to grasp it before she can take it back. I try to frame my next question in a way that guarantees an affirmative response – surely, as a mother, she would confront someone if they were upsetting her child! She does indeed respond in the affirmative (l. 12), but my little "victory" is short-lived, as Sarah's language once again becomes tentative: "I I might do that" (l. 14). Tentative talk allows the speaker to hedge a direct anger claim. Sarah uses tentative talk throughout her interview, perhaps because it allowed her to avoid making a direct anger claim in the face of my insistence that she do so.

I certainly did not set out to "control" interviewees' responses. I genuinely believed that I was open to hearing their stories in their own words. One of my key assumptions, however, was that interviewees would indeed tell "stories" as I understood them (e.g., with characters, linear sequence of events, description of behaviours and consequences). When these stories were conspicuously absent from interviewees' discourse, I feared that I would not have enough analysable data. So, rather than being open to interviewees' own thoughts, reflections, and lessons about

anger, as I had originally intended, I became very directive, pulling for responses that fit my notion of useable data.

4.5 Summary

Interviewees used minimizing and distancing strategies to construct anger as within their control, in the past, and forgotten. Minimizing strategies included using contrast to construct oneself as relatively calm and composed, and downplaying the impact of one's anger by claiming that no real harm was done. Distancing strategies included positioning anger in the past by claiming that one no longer has any reason to be angry or that one has outgrown anger. Finally, both minimizing and distancing strategies were used to construct anger as forgotten. I discussed how these constructions might be understood in the context of the research interview. The following discussion will explore what was accomplished by these constructions.

5. DISCUSSION

Anger-talk serves many functions, including presenting ourselves in a particular light. Interviewees in the present study used minimizing and distancing strategies to establish that they were not “angry women.”

5.1 Anger is Within My Control

It is not particularly surprising that interviewees worked to construct themselves as calm and composed women whose anger is well within their control. Anger is seen as a dangerous and disruptive force in western cultures; it is something to be controlled, curbed, kept in check (Crawford et al., 1992; Lakoff, 1987; Lutz, 1990). Angry women, in particular, are vilified and feared in western culture (Miller, 1991). Women’s direct expressions of anger have been ignored, dismissed, ridiculed, and punished (Cox et al., 1999; Crawford et al., 1992; Jack, 1999; Miller, 1991; Reiser, 1999). Well aware of the labels used to describe “angry women” (e.g., hysterical, witch, shrew, bitch), women often condemn their own expressions of anger, referring to their behaviour as irrational and destructive (Jack, 1999; Lerner, 1997).

In the current investigation, interviewees’ talk suggested that they negatively evaluated their own expressions of anger. For example, Anne condemned her explosive behaviour as “stupid” (Excerpt 20), and Ruth repeatedly referred to herself as a “petty person” when describing her anger responses (Excerpt 24). Campbell and Muncer (1987) used the term “pre-emptive self-condemnation” to describe these types of evaluative comments made by women as they described their own angry behaviour.

These authors suggested that women use this strategy to ward off negative reactions from their audience.

It has been suggested that women are socialized to be nurturers and peacekeepers (Jack, 1999), and that they invest a great deal of energy in protecting others and preserving harmony in relationships (Lerner, 1997). According to several theorists, women often view the direct expression of anger as a threat to their relationships and connections with others (Miller, 1991; Valentis & Devane, 1994). Some of Jack's (2001) participants reported keeping anger out of their relationships through self-silencing, or "doing nothing."

Margaret and Sarah both spoke of their ability to suppress anger in this way. Sarah, for example, claimed that she would "just quietly come home upset" rather than "make a fuss" (Excerpt 1). Margaret claimed that she held in anger for her children's sake: "when I thought about getting angry or really raising Cain about something – well, for the kids' sake you calm yourself." Both suggest that anger responses are the result of deliberate choices. They both claim that rather than "make a fuss" or "raise Cain," their response would be more mature and measured.

Lutz's (1990) interview participants also spoke of their ability to control emotions. She suggested that "women, more than men, may speak of control because they are concerned about counteracting the cultural denigration of themselves through an association with emotion. 'I think it's important to control emotions,' they say, and implicitly remind a critical audience that they have the cooler stuff it takes to be considered mature and rational" (p.75).

Margaret claimed that she was able to "talk herself out of anger," choosing to

“walk away” rather than “blow (her) stack.” Other interviewees worked to explain their non-confrontational responses by establishing that they were simply non-confrontational by nature. For example, when asked if she would consider confronting a particular anger target, Joan’s response was emphatic: “No. I wouldn’t ever...I’m not one to go (pause) sort of publicly complaining or usually confronting.”

Interviewees in the current investigation grew up in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s, when femininity meant self-sacrifice. This was a time when girls and women were advised to be considerate, avoid conflict, and strive for harmony and unity (Cancian & Gordon, 1988). Any action that involved opposing another or creating conflict was seen as hurtful and selfish (Jack, 1999). When they interviewed nine older women (aged 62 to 79) Minick and Gueldner (1995) found these women avoided expressing anger directly. They suggested their participants valued their relationships more than “winning” a conflict and had been socialized to suppress anger.

As I sat down to talk to interviewees about their anger experiences, one of my assumptions was that women of their “generation” would have been taught, as young girls and women, that they should not directly communicate anger. Anne was the only interviewee who explicitly referred to being “conditioned” or socialized in terms of anger and its expression: “I think I grew up with the same conditioning as other women my age did that girls are supposed to be good and sweet and kind and and anger is just not an acceptable emotion. *Mmhhh*. Uh, especially you know expressed overtly” (Excerpt 19, ll. 3-7).

I also assumed that interviewees would look to their mothers as role-models to learn how women communicate anger. While interviewees did not explicitly describe

their mothers as role-models, they did speak of them as calm and nurturing peace-keepers. Sarah claimed that her mother “never really got angry” and “never really raised her voice.” Margaret claimed that her mother “didn’t believe in hitting” her children. Instead, she would “soft-soap” the boys when they’d be fighting. Margaret clearly admired her mother’s peacekeeping skills: “she was very good that way.”

Given the context of the conversation (i.e., a research interview with a psychology graduate student), interviewees may have been motivated to present themselves as “normal.” And “normal” in our culture means being able to control and direct our emotions rather than responding reflexively and impulsively. These self-presentational concerns may have influenced their constructions of anger as well within their control.

5.2 Anger is in the Past and Forgotten

Popular stereotypes suggest that people become less emotional as they age (Gross et al., 1997); that they “mellow with age.” We like to think that one of the few perks of old age will be accumulated wisdom and a new perspective on what is really important in life (e.g., what is really worth getting upset about). Interviewees’ efforts to position anger in the past, and thereby construct themselves as women who had outgrown anger, might reflect these social expectations. Ruth claimed that she has “mellowed” (Excerpt 21, l. 27). Sarah claimed that she has become more understanding and “tolerant” (Excerpt 14, ll. 4-9), and suggested that she has become more accepting or resigned: “I think, think after you’ve lived as many years as I’ve lived you, things happen so you’re just like well, that’s just the way it is, you know?”

My questions pulled for some evidence of this kind of change over time,

specifically of change in the way interviewees express anger, or in their sense of freedom to express anger. I came into this investigation assuming that older women would feel somewhat liberated from social norms and constraints, and would therefore feel more free to express anger than they had when they were young girls and women. There was some evidence in the literature to support my assumptions. Rountree (1999) found that one of the themes running through her conversations with women in their seventies was freedom from role constraints and others' expectations. In their survey of young, middle-aged and older adults, Malatesta and Kalnok (1984) found that "conventional constraints on the overt display of affect appear to have less impact on older vs. younger individuals" (p.301). In other words, they found that older interviewees were less likely than either younger or middle-aged interviewees to monitor and inhibit their emotional expressions.

In order to "test" my assumption, I asked most interviewees whether they felt more or less free now, as older women, to express anger (Excerpts 10 and 15). Considering that I did not offer "no change" as a response option, it is not surprising that all interviewees reported that there had indeed been a change in their experience or expression of anger over time. Rather than report that they felt more free to express anger, however, interviewees suggested that they felt free *from* anger; they reported being less reactive, and having fewer anger triggers, than 20 or 30 years ago. For example, Sarah claimed that she had become more tolerant (Excerpt 14), and Margaret claimed that she had no reason to get angry about things anymore (Excerpt 11).

Positioning anger in the past accomplishes a number of social functions. For example, it provides evidence of interviewees' development and accumulated wisdom.

At times, interviewees' talk suggested they were imparting lessons to me, as a younger woman. Sarah, in particular, framed some of her statements as lessons that she had learned over the years: "I guess I've learned that... if you get really upset and mad yourself and have it inside, you're just hurting yourself" (Excerpt 2); "I think as you get older maybe you're a little uh ... maybe a little more understanding" (Excerpt 14); "I think, I think after you've lived as many years as I've lived you, things happen so you're just like well, that's just the way it is, you know?" I regret that I devalued these lessons when they were offered. As I conducted the interviews, I had a clear picture of what a "good" response looked like (i.e., description of a specific anger episode), and I was often frustrated with Sarah's responses because they did not fit this image. I was so worried about generating sufficient analysable data that I did not recognize the value of alternative contributions.

By positioning anger in the past, interviewees constructed themselves as strong and resilient women. Rather than construct anger as a dangerous force that threatens their relationships (Jack, 1999), interviewees claimed that they have overcome anger and relegated it to the past. Joan, for example, claimed that she consciously "dropped" anger to keep it from "eating (her) up" (Excerpt 16).

In addition, by suggesting that anger was behind them, interviewees were able to highlight something *positive* about their stage in life. Old age is typically seen as a time of decline (Hansson et al., 1984; Knight, 1996), but interviewees constructed it as a time of freedom from anger and other stressors: "you haven't got too many worries now" (Excerpt 12). In other words, these women highlighted some of the "possibilities of age" (Friedan, 1993).

Finally, constructing anger as forgotten supports one's claims that anger is in the past. It also serves to dismiss anger as insignificant by contrasting anger episodes with seemingly more important and meaningful memories. In constructing anger as forgotten, Sarah suggests that her life had been so happy that "the good times... far over-ride the bad times" (Excerpt 28).

Interviewees' reports of diminished anger responses and fewer anger triggers may be seen as additional support for Gross et al.'s (1997) "emotional control model," which predicts an age-related decrease in negative affect. Birditt and Fingerman (2003) might explain these findings by suggesting that older adults are less likely to report feeling anger because they wish to maintain harmony in their relationships. An important contribution of the current study is a better understanding of how *interviewees* account for these reported decreases in anger (e.g., claiming they have outgrown anger).

5.3 The Salience of Age and Gender in Anger-talk

Interviewees rarely positioned themselves as older women. This type of positioning may have seemed unnecessary and redundant, as I repeatedly and explicitly situated interviewees as "older women" in the wording of my questions. I seemed to be reminding them that this was the perspective from which I wanted them to respond. In addition, there may have been resistance on the part of the interviewees to labelling themselves as older women, as doing so would have had the potential of identifying them as part of a collective as opposed to individual persons.

Age and gender were implicitly rather than explicitly implicated in interviewees' talk. As they worked to position anger in the past, their talk alluded to

their stage in life, accumulated wisdom, and the “mellowing” effects of age. Gender was implicated in interviewees’ use of normalization to compare their own responses to those of other women: “I think I’m not alone, I dealt with anger by drinking....I think there was a lot of women sat at home alone and drank;” “Dr. ____ told me that uh that I was stockpiling my anger and that a lot of women do it” (Excerpt 20). Otherwise, age and gender were conspicuously absent from their anger-talk.

5.4 Limitations and Future Research Directions

The current investigation has two main limitations: the use of interview data, and the use of “Jefferson Lite” transcription notation (Potter & Hepburn, in press). The use of interviews in discourse analysis has been questioned and challenged by several researchers (Potter, 2003; Potter & Edwards, 2001; Potter & Hepburn, in press; Wood & Kroger, 2000). One of their major criticisms is that interviews are flooded with the researcher’s own agenda and categories (Potter, 2002; Potter, 2003; Potter & Hepburn, in press; Wood & Kroger, 2000). Throughout this discussion, I have recognized my role in shaping the anger-talk. I understand that this talk is co-constructed by myself and interviewees.

To avoid the same level of active researcher involvement, and in the interest of studying how *interviewees* construct anger, in future investigations I would not use interviews as a means of collecting data. Rather, I would study how older women talk about anger amongst themselves, perhaps in a focus group setting.

Potter and Wetherell (1987) advocated the use of a simplified version of Jeffersonian transcription: “for many sorts of research questions, the fine details of timing and intonation are not crucial, and indeed they can interfere with the readability

of the transcript, particularly when dealing with extended sequences and for people unused to the system” (p.166). This was my first attempt at using discourse analysis and I certainly was “unused to the system.” I chose, therefore, to heed Potter and Wetherell’s (1987) advice; I used a modified version of Jefferson’s notational system (see Appendix E). My modifications included limiting the paralinguistic features captured in the transcribed discourse, and using untimed rather than timed pauses.

Potter has since changed his stance on transcription notation. Today, he and his colleagues refer to this type of modified Jeffersonian transcription as “Jefferson Lite,” and argue that it leaves the reader with a “reconstructed, simplified and distorted version” of the talk (Potter & Hepburn, in press, p.11). These authors argue that “the full Jeffersonian representation of talk makes most apparent the jointly constructed, socially engaged nature of what is going on” (p.12). In the interest of allowing a more detailed analysis of anger-talk, in future investigations I would use the original Jefferson transcription notation rather than “Jefferson Lite.”

5.5 General Conclusions

Interviewees’ attempts to minimize and distance anger instantiate cultural views of anger as dangerous and destructive, and the social consequences of being seen to be an angry woman. The particular discursive strategies that they employed also instantiate cultural expectations that older adults will “mellow” with age.

By minimizing and distancing anger, interviewees effectively neutralized it. Rather than a powerful destructive force, they constructed anger as relatively insignificant in their lives.

Interviewees worked to establish that they were not “angry women.” They

constructed themselves as calm, composed, and mature women who chose to “walk away” or “quietly come home upset” rather than “blow (their) stack” or “make a fuss.” They also constructed themselves as strong, wise women who had learned to put anger in perspective, overcome it, and leave it behind.

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Appendix A

Recruitment Poster

OLDER WOMEN INVITED...

... to talk about times when they experienced anger.

My name is Catherine Delaney, and I am a psychology graduate student at the University of Saskatchewan. I am doing a study to learn more about older women's (aged 60 years & older) anger experiences.

If you would like to learn more about this study, please take one of these letters →
If all of the letters have been taken, please feel free to phone me at (phone number), or send an e-mail to _____. I will be happy to send you a letter describing the study in greater detail.

If, after reading the letter, you decide you would like to participate, you can contact me and we will arrange to meet for an interview at a time and location that is convenient for you.

Thank-you for your interest in this study,

Catherine Delaney
University of Saskatchewan

Appendix B

Introductory Letter

Department of Psychology Study on Older Women's Anger Experiences

My name is Catherine Delaney, and I am a student at the University of Saskatchewan working on my Ph.D. in applied social psychology. I am doing a study to learn more about older women's anger experiences. I am hoping to speak to women aged 60 years and older about times in their lives when they felt anger.

If you decide that you would like to participate in this study, I will ask you to meet with me for a one-on-one interview. During the interview I will ask you to talk about times when you felt angry. I will begin by asking you about fairly recent anger experiences, but you are welcome to share earlier anger experiences as well. You can tell me whatever you would like to tell me about those experiences, and in whatever way you would like to tell me. I may at times ask you questions to get a fuller understanding of your stories (e.g., who was involved?).

The interview will take approximately one to two hours of your time and will be audio-taped. We can meet in your home or in a private interview room on the university campus, whichever would be more comfortable and convenient for you. Some time after the interview I will give you a copy of the transcript of our discussion, and if you would like, we could meet again so that you can share your feedback, comments, or questions, or any thoughts that you might have had after the interview. I will also give you a copy of my initial thoughts and reflections about the stories you have shared with me, and invite your reactions and comments. If you decide to participate, I will be sure to keep your identity confidential – that is, I will not use your name or any other details that would allow other people to identify you.

People participating in similar interviews have often reported that they enjoyed the opportunity to reflect on, and discuss, their experiences. Through participating in this study, you may find you gain new insights about yourself and your experiences.

Thank you for your interest in this study. If you have any questions or concerns, or would like to participate, please call me at (phone number), or send me an e-mail _____. You may also contact Jim Cheesman, the Acting Department Head for the Department of Psychology, at 966-6666.

Sincerely,

Catherine Delaney

Appendix C Consent Form

Study Title: Older Women's Anger Experiences
Researchers: Catherine Delaney, Ph.D. student
Department of Psychology, University of Saskatchewan
Phone: 652-4592
Dr. Linda McMullen, Supervisor
Professor, Department of Psychology, University of Saskatchewan
Phone: 966-6657 (on leave July 1, 2002- June 30, 2003)

The purpose of this study is to learn about older women's anger experiences. You will be asked to talk about times when you felt angry. I will begin by asking you about fairly recent anger experiences, but you are welcome to share earlier anger experiences as well. You can tell me whatever you would like to tell me about those experiences, and in whatever way you would like to tell me. I may at times ask you questions to get a fuller understanding of your stories (e.g., who was involved?). You can choose not to answer any of these questions and still participate in the study.

One of the possible benefits of participating in this study is the chance to reflect on, and discuss, some of the experiences that you have had. This process may lead to new insights about yourself and your experiences.

One of the potential risks involved with this research is that you may experience some emotional discomfort if you recall, or discuss, specific episodes or events that have been particularly upsetting. If you begin to experience distress or discomfort during the interview, we will end the interview. I will also give you the names of some local counsellors or therapists you can contact if you find you are having a hard time dealing with painful thoughts or feelings triggered by the interview.

The interview will last approximately one to two hours. To ensure the accurate recording of the information you will be sharing, the interview will be tape recorded and later transcribed in written form. Once the interview has been transcribed, you will be sent a smoothed version of the transcript and invited to share any feedback, comments or concerns related to the transcript. If you would like, we can meet to discuss your feedback and possibly make changes to the transcript. Once you feel the transcript accurately reflects what you said in the interview, you will be asked to sign a Transcript Release Form.

You will also be sent a copy of the researcher's initial thoughts and reflections on your interview. You will, once again, be invited to share your reactions, comments, or concerns. With your permission, your reactions and comments will be incorporated into the final document.

Following the initial interview, I will ask if you would be open to a second interview in case I have further questions or would like to clarify points from the first interview.

You are free to decline a second interview. If you have any further questions or concerns about the study, whether they come up during the course of the research project or at some future date, I will be happy to discuss those with you. When the study is complete, I will send you a summary of its findings and conclusions.

Now that you know more about the study, it is entirely your choice whether or not you want to participate. If you do choose to participate, you can decide at any time to change your mind and withdraw from the study. You may choose to withdraw some time during or after the initial interview. Or, you may choose to withdraw after you have had a chance to read the transcripts of your interview, or my initial reflections on your interview. If you withdraw after information has already been collected from you, this information will be deleted from the study, and all audio tapes or transcripts of your interview will be destroyed.

Though direct quotes will be taken from your interview transcript and recorded in the final write-up of the study, your identity will be kept confidential. I will remove your name and any information that could identify you from the transcripts. A pseudonym will be used in the transcripts and in the final document. The audio tapes, transcripts, and signed consent forms will be stored in a secure location at the University of Saskatchewan under the care of my supervisor, Dr. Linda McMullen. According to University guidelines, these materials will be stored for a minimum of five years.

The information shared by yourself and the other participants in this study will be part of the final written document for my thesis. In the future, I may also publish research articles about this study or present the findings of this study at conferences. I will make every effort to protect your identity in these written documents or presentations.

I, _____, acknowledge that this study and the contents
(please print)
of this consent form have been explained to me by Catherine Delaney. I understand the nature of this study and my rights as explained in this consent form, and I have been given a copy of this form for my records. I agree to participate in this study.

Participant

Date

Researcher

Date

This research project was reviewed and approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research on August 9, 2002. If you have any questions about this study or your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the researcher, Catherine Delaney at ____; the Acting Department Head for the Department of Psychology, Jim Cheesman at 966-6666; or the Office of Research Services at 966-4053.

Appendix D

Transcript Release Form

I, _____, have reviewed the complete transcript of my personal interview in this study, and acknowledge that the transcript accurately reflects what I said in my personal interview with Catherine Delaney. I hereby authorize the release of this transcript to Catherine Delaney, to be used in the manner described in the consent form. I have received a copy of this Transcript Release Form for my own records.

Participant's signature

Date

Researcher's signature

Date

Appendix E

Transcription Conventions

- Regular font is used during interviewee talk; italicized font is used during interviewer talk
- Underlining indicates that words are uttered with added emphasis
e.g., I can't be sure why at that point
- The period marks a completing intonation (not necessarily a full grammatical stop)
- The comma marks a continuing intonation (not necessarily a grammatical comma)
- A question mark indicates a rising inflection
- An exclamation point indicates an animated or emphatic tone
- Additional paralinguistic features are placed in double brackets ((hushed voice))
- Dash marks indicate a noticeable and abrupt termination of a word or sound
e.g., (Intel – smarts are good)
- Although the precise times of pauses in talk were not recorded, general descriptions including (pause) and (long pause) were used to indicate obvious pauses lasting <5 seconds, and 5 or more seconds respectively.
- An equals sign at the end of a speaker's utterance and at the start of the next utterance indicates the absence of a discernable gap
e.g.,
A: Anyway Brian =
B: = okay, okay
- Square brackets mark overlap between utterances (and times when one person interrupts the other's flow of talk)
e.g.,
A: Right [so you
B: [I'm not sure
- Use of brackets indicates details in the transcript that have been changed to protect the identity of the interviewee, or when the transcriber is unsure of a word or phrase
e.g., I would've been in (small town); I couldn't (tell you) that
- Use of a blank space indicates times when information has been deleted from the transcript to protect the identity of the interviewee (e.g., Dr. ____ told me...)